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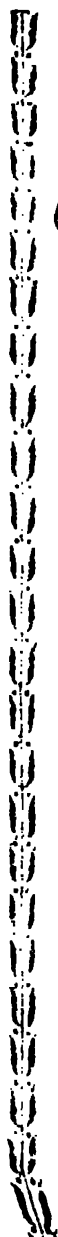
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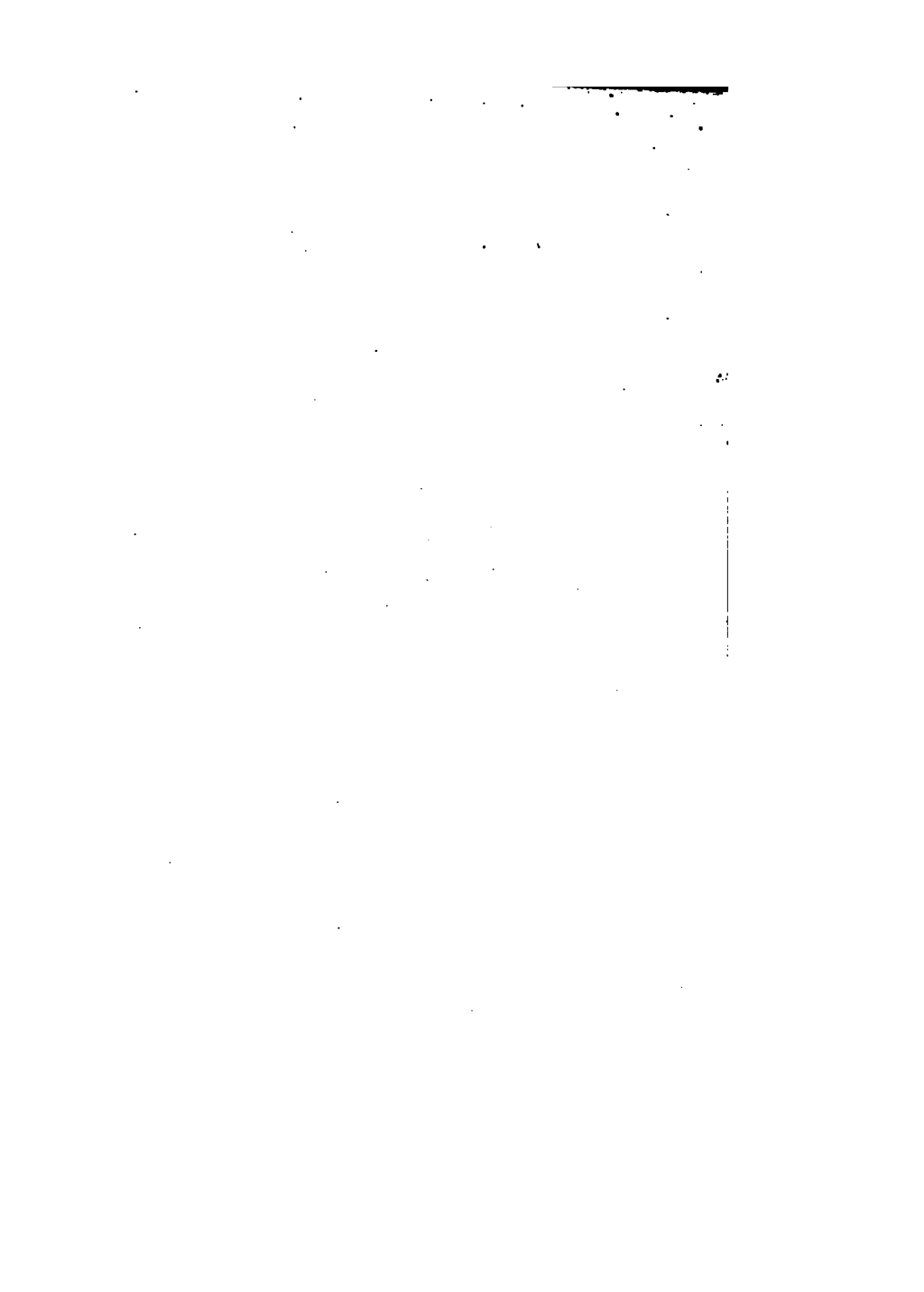
CAP'N GID

ELIZABETH LINCOLN GOULD





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CAP'N GID

By

Elizabeth Lincoln Gould

Author of "Grandma"

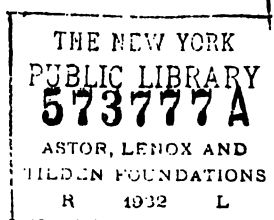
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Cap'n Gid

JOY W. B.
CLUB
MAR 21



CAP'N GID

CHAPTER I

A ROARING March wind tore along the road, but old Asa Dean in his sun-parlor rejoiced at the sight of dry leaves and twigs and stray bits of paper whirling and rattling past while he sat safe and warm behind the sheltering glass.

"Just the kind o' day to blow folks' heads clear o' nonsense," he muttered. "Town Meeting work is two days old now, and it's high time those that have been yappin' like dogs at one another for weeks should begin acting like

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human bein's. I suspect it's taken Cap'n Gid most o' the time to get calmed down, though he's never one o' the yappin' kind."

On a small table at Mr. Dean's elbow lay a backgammon board with the men set out in proper order, ready for the first move. The old man looked at it longingly, and then consulted a big silver watch that lay beside it.

"Gid's a full half hour later'n he's been any Thursday morning for the last five years since he began coming to play," he said reproachfully to his daughter who stepped out from the house to see if he had everything he wished at hand. "Do you suppose that Widow Mason has waylaid him?"

"Marilla says he steers clear of her house," said Mrs. Gaynes. "Maybe he isn't coming to-day. You know, father, he got real worked up at Town Meeting and he spoke pretty sharp to Henry about the drinking fountain."

"What o' that?" demanded her father. "Supposin' he does think Henry and the others have been short-sighted not to take the advice of a man fifty-two years old that's had wide

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experience, what's that to do with our rubber o' gammon?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mrs. Gaynes hastily, wishing she had held her tongue. "Look, father! Here comes Eddy Foss running down the hill. Maybe he's been up there; the cap'n makes a lot of him, and he's at the house more than half the time, his mother says. Marilla sends him on errands."

"Hail him, won't ye?" besought Mr. Dean. "Like as not he'll tear right past to the post-office if you don't. They may talk all they like about that boy's being delicate and being kept out of school on that account, but he beats any other child ever I saw for running. Hail him!"

Mrs. Gaynes obediently waved her apron and called from the end of the piazza while her father rapped as sharply as he dared on the glass. The boy turned and ran up the path, beginning to talk before he was fairly admitted to the sun-parlor.

"I was—coming—anyway," he gasped. "You—needn't—have—screeched—so loud!"

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"Here, catch your breath, sonny," counseled Asa Dean, although his curiosity had mounted high. "Your news'll keep a minute or two. I don't see anybody on the horizon that can get here an' tell it before ye. There now, what is it?"

"Cap'n Gid has gone!" said little Eddy Foss, his voice still breathless, but apparently because of his weight of importance rather than his recent haste. "Yes, s'r, he's gone, an' his trunk's gone the same train, an' he took his big valise, an' he'd gone when I got there, an' Miss Marilla she don't know when he's coming back nor whether he ever is, an' ——"

"Hold on!" roared old Asa Dean. "Where's he gone? What kind o' tomfoolery is this you're talking, boy?"

"She said he'd gone to the city." Eddy Foss was delighted with the effect of his announcement, eyeing the old man's crimson face with great satisfaction; it had seldom been his privilege to impart news of much importance to any one. "She said he was 'snapping mad, an' wouldn't brook any questioning,'" quoted

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the boy glibly. "He left the jack-knife he'd promised me wrapped up in a piece o' paper with my name on it. Want to see it?"

The crimson in the old face so close to his was fading to a purplish tint, and the sight of the knife aroused no gleam of interest in the eyes that gazed so dully at it.

"They went too far, that's what they did," muttered Asa Dean. "An' your Henry was to blame, much as anybody," he added, turning on his daughter who had lingered, unwisely as she now discovered. "You've driven him away from the town that owes him more'n anybody else, that's what you've done, amongst ye," he said bitterly.

"Now, father," began Mrs. Gaynes, "you know I never went near the Town Meeting. You can't blame me, anyway——"

The old man brushed aside her words with a wave of his trembling hand. Eddy Foss was listening, wide-eyed. Here would be something more to tell at home; it was a morning rich in promise.

"Where's anybody that wants to write him

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going to direct letters?" asked Mr. Dean impatiently. "Did Murilly tell ye that?"

"She gave me a slip o' paper for you," said Eddy Foss, reluctantly, for now he knew that his hour of importance was drawing to its close. "It's in one o' my pockets. He took the back road to the station, Mr. Dean, so's he wouldn't meet folks, Miss Marilla said, an' it's awful muddy there. She said he must've got his shoes all sploshed with it before he'd got down to the turn, but he wouldn't hear to anything she said, an' they were his second best shoes, too; nor she couldn't prevail on him to put on his arctics, neither. She said she went just as far as she dared, an' a mite farther."

"I'll warrant she did," and in the midst of his trouble a grim smile widened the old man's mouth. "How many more pockets have you got, sonny? You're taking pretty good care not to strike the right one too soon."

"Here 'tis, Mr. Dean," and having reached the last of his nine pockets, Eddy Foss slowly produced the slip of paper, much crumpled and

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bearing the marks of its recent companionship with a ginger nut cooky, quite fresh and still delightfully rich.

The old man spread it, smoothing its many wrinkles, on his knee, and put on his reading glasses. The writing was unmistakably that of Captain Gideon Bold.

“‘Till further notice address me at 385 Walnut Street, Middleton. Good-bye,’” read Asa Dean; he paused and read the words a second time while Eddy Foss made certain that the address was firmly enough fixed in his mind to insure its correct transmission to his mother; after that, he could afford to forget it.

“Well,” said old Asa Dean, “well—he’s done it. Times enough he’s said he would, but I never really believed him. Now he’s done it, sure and certain. We’ll see how they’ll get on without him, these smart young folks that think they know so much better’n he does. Old fellers like me expect to be laid on the shelf, but Gid’s right in his prime; a man that went ’round the world, ’most, fol-lerin’ the sea when he wasn’t more’n a young-

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ster ; made cap'n in his twenties ; coming home to settle down in this dead 'n' alive place on account of his old mother ; seeing her through and ever since then keeping on here so's Marilly can feel she has folks, 'cause she helped out with his mother those five years when her head wa'n't quite right. There's a cousin for you ! And generous to a fault with his money to the town. They're a parcel o' young fools, that's what they are ! I reckon the Widow Mason and half a dozen others'll wear the willow. Come spring time they all have hopes of him every year. Let's see how this town'll get on now. Let's see ! ”

Eddy Foss waited, fearful lest by a hasty departure he might lose some plum of knowledge ; at last seeing that the old man had quite forgotten him he slid out of his chair, and through the door which led to the kitchen. A few moments later he fared joyfully on his way, a hot cooky in each hand, the crumbs of a third decorating the corners of his mouth.

“ I'll bet ye they'll beseech him back before a month's gone,” muttered Asa Dean. “ And

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they'll get Marilly to intercede for 'em, that's what they'll do. I'd like to hear her remarks when they do. Yes, sir, a month's all I'll give 'em, an' I'll bet ye it's more than they'll take!"





CHAPTER II

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon, and Mrs. Rose Tippet, wiping the dust from the window sills on which the March wind, tearing by, had thrown it, gave a little sigh.

"I am thankful Mrs. Hitchings is not at home," she said. "If she were she would be sure to come in here and tell me the furniture covering will fade if I'm not more careful about pulling down the shades. She little knows how careful I am. If I only *could* fade that flaming red! but I imagine that shade never fades. If she hadn't made me buy it! I don't believe it was a bargain; I believe nobody would take it

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off their hands. Ugh! More than a year and a half I've looked at it, and it is worse than ever."

As she stood with her back to the windows, surveying the long parlor, her gaze fixed on one serviceable chair after another and lingering though with evident lack of joy on the large sofa with its five plump cushions, her figure struck a note quite out of harmony,—for Mrs. Rose Tippet was Southern born and so far from serviceable in appearance that the solid chairs and above all the great sofa seemed to cast reproach upon her. In addition to her slender figure and her delicate face with its appealing eyes and vivid, sensitive mouth, Mrs. Tippet was further endowed with a crown of red-gold hair.

"When I sit in one of those dreadful chairs to talk to a possible boarder I shall look a perfect fright," she had said to herself on the day Mrs. Hitchings bargained for the flaming red. "But I suppose I needn't sit; standing would doubtless be more fitting for one in my position. I shall have to stand in the middle of

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the room to get out of range of that awful sofa. After all, I suppose it matters very little how I look," and she sighed, but so softly that Mrs. Hitchings, bringing the bargain to a triumphant close, did not hear.

Now as she stood looking about her, Mrs. Tippetts sighed again and then, inconsistently, she smiled ; it was a wistful little smile, but it touched her lips with humor, giving them an upward curve.

"Probably that biggest chair will just suit Captain Gideon Bold," she murmured. "I'm sure he must be a large, masterful man ; his two letters had such a firm sound, and yesterday's telegram was so commanding—'Make preparations for arrival to-morrow afternoon. G. Bold.' And his card with 'Captain Gideon Bold' on it has a stern, uncompromising look. I'm sure he will be an exacting person, but he may be kind-hearted, as so many military men are. I suppose he must be military."

There came the sound of carriage wheels stopping at the house. She looked out and saw a cab, the door of which was closed, while

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on the box the driver sat talking volubly to a small, mud-bespattered man.

"If Captain Gideon Bold is in that cab the driver would better stop talking to his friend and get down before the door bursts open to let out the captain and his wrath," thought Mrs. Tippet. "If he is angry when he comes in, he probably won't like anything. Don't I remember how it was with Mr. Farnham that first week, all because he tripped on the door-mat? Why—*why!*"

The small man had shaken hands with the cab-driver and leaped nimbly down to the sidewalk. He opened the cab-door and brought to light a large valise and an umbrella. Closing the door with a sharp slam he briskly mounted the steps and rang the bell.

Unmindful of the instructions of Mrs. Hitchings, remembering only how long it took the maid to answer the bell except when the post-man rang, Mrs. Tippet hurried to the door. Opening it she looked straight into a pair of merry blue eyes which twinkled at her from a brown, humorous face, combining with a gener-

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ous mouth to offset the effect of a high-bridged autocratic nose.

"Cap'n Gideon Bold, miss," and by a quick manœuvre the umbrella was made to share the hand which held the large valise, while the other hand swept the captain's hat from his head. "I presume Mrs. Tippet may have told you she expected me."

"Come in, please," said Mrs. Tippet, a tinge of pink creeping into her cheeks. "The rather dim light of the hall has deceived you. I am Mrs. Rose Tippet, and very glad to see you, Captain Bold."

Hat in hand the captain followed her into the parlor. There he set his valise on the floor and placing against a chair his umbrella with his hat balanced on its silver knob, he held out his hand.

"You'll pardon me," he said with twinkling eyes, "if I state that the light had nothing to do with my mistake, Mrs. Tippet. I hope you're as pleased to have me here as I am to come, and that you'll count on me from a to z for anything I can do for you while I'm here."

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I can't say just how long that will be. If you have a few minutes to spare I can give you a brief outline of the cause of my coming, or we can let it go till later ; any way you say will suit me."

In the year and a half that Mrs. Rose Tippet had kept her "select boarding-house" she had seen many sorts of people ; she had been interviewed by the harsh and the bland, the conciliatory and the domineering, but never had she encountered any one resembling this man with his instant friendliness and his offers of help.

"You surely are too good to be true," she told him in her soft drawl. "I mean you're too kind and thoughtful to be a real boarder, Captain Bold. I'm afraid you've come out of a fairy tale."

"I'm plain flesh and blood," and the captain's eyes twinkled at her again. "And I'm pretty well spattered from my walk down to the station. Three miles down the back road I walked, and I was so mad when I started I didn't pick my steps. It eased my feelings to

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walk right through the puddles, and I set my feet down harder than I need for the first half of the way. After that I'd begun to cool off a bit and chose my way more carefully, but the mud had got in its work before that. Mighty powers! I hope none of it's come off on this handsome chair!" and the captain jumped from his seat and bent his head to examine the rep. "I'd better stand," he said firmly, after discovering a few specks of dried mud. "Yes, I'll stand."

"Please don't," said Mrs. Tippetts whose mind was in a whirl. "If the chair should need to be washed the color might fade a little, and I'd be so glad."

"Thank you," said the captain. "It's very polite of you, but 'twould be a pity to dim that splendid color; I can stand as well as not. As I was saying, you naturally want to know the reason of my leaving home and coming here."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Tippetts, "no indeed! That is no affair of mine, Captain Bold. My boarders' private concerns are not confided to me, of course. I'm very glad you wished to

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come, whatever the reason. You have written so liberally about the price. I hate to charge so much for the room, but you see, it is the largest in the house and it requires a coal fire always on cool days, because the furnace——”

“There, never mind that,” and the captain nodded at her genially. “Don’t pucker your forehead over that, please. I know how furnaces act. Haven’t I got one in my own house? and can I keep my north room warm except when I can’t *get* it cool? Never. Well, to make a long matter short I’ve lived for thirty-five years in one town—fifteen of them when I was a boy and the other twenty since I gave up the sea because it seemed on the whole best to do it—and I’ve only just found out that I’m not needed at all. I’ve been flattering myself I was of some use, but it seems I’m not.”

There was no twinkle left in the blue eyes; the nose held sway over the face and the mouth was no longer humorous. Mrs. Tippet caught her lower lip between her teeth. It had been a hard day and she was tired. Could it be that after the promise of his opening speech this

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new boarder would disappoint her? But while she looked at him wistfully his face cleared.

"I've come away to teach 'em a lesson, Mrs. Tippet," he said with a quick return to cheerfulness. "I've learned one myself, now let's see what they'll learn. They're planning to plant the new drinking fountain right down in front of the tavern in the blinding sun, instead of setting it the other side of the green under the shade trees. They claim it'll look better out there, and they haven't one of them got imagination enough to think how it'll feel to the horses and the travelers. Well, I wish them joy of it, that's all. I wish them joy of it, and of raising the money for it, what's more. Not a penny of mine will they get. They've appointed Henry Gaynes, son-in-law of my old friend Asa Dean, collector of funds, and a poor choice they've made," he added.

"I'm sure they have, if you say so," murmured Mrs. Tippet, beginning to like her new boarder again, for after all he was evidently not given to long-standing rage. "And now I think you'd like to go to your room, Captain Bold."

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"Maybe I'd better," and catching up his valise as if it were a toy, putting his umbrella under one arm and his hat under the other, the captain stood aside for Mrs. Tippet to lead the way.

He was feeling a little tired and a good deal excited. He had expected to find in Mrs. Rose Tippet a woman resembling in a general way Mrs. Hannah Gorham, who kept the only boarding-house in Pelling. He had thought of her as a type quite sure to be found under given circumstances. But instead of sharp eyes he had looked into soft brown ones, instead of a long determined jaw he had seen a delicately rounded chin, and in place of a mouth so thin-lipped and straight that it always reminded him of the slit in Eddy Foss's penny savings-bank he had gazed at a scarlet witchery of curves. Mrs. Hannah Gorham was rigid as one of her own gate-posts, Mrs. Rose Tippet was like—the captain was not able to decide just what she was like, but it surely was not a gate-post.

He was thinking about it as they went up

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the stairs; still thinking about it as he followed Mrs. Tippet around the room, looking obediently at everything she pointed out.

"See here," he said, "are you sure you're charging me enough? Hot water coming right up into my room is worth considerable, and a closet that size. I shall have to hang up everything I own, handkerchiefs and all, to cover those nails. Whew! I wish Cousin Marilla could see this closet. She's the one who keeps house for me, and for all she hasn't any great array of garments, she's forever mourning about the lack of closet room in my old home."

"You see I've put in half a dozen coat-hangers and half a dozen trousers hangers, in case you might not have remembered to bring them, coming away in haste," said Mrs. Tippet, her heart greatly cheered by this liberal encouragement. "I know gentlemen do forget, sometimes."

The captain threw back his head and laughed. At the sound Mrs. Tippet heard a soft stir from the landing above, and through the crack of the

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door she saw on the landing a figure poised in a listening attitude.

"I'm thinking about the string Marilla's stretched across my closet up home," said the captain, "and how my winter suit sagged it down. I'm intending to buy a spring overcoat and an extra pair of trousers, now I'm in the city; and I may get something in the line of a dressy suit," he added thoughtfully. "The hooks and everything will come in very handy, thank you."

"Dinner is at half-past six," said Mrs. Tippet, smiling back at him from the door. "I hope you will enjoy meeting the other boarders."

"Of course I shall," said the captain. "I like folks, always have liked 'em. I'll be on hand at the time appointed."

As Mrs. Tippet softly closed the door he stood in the middle of the room looking about him, his lips pursed for a whistle; he breathed "The Girl I Left Behind Me," with the least possible sound, nodding in time.

"Wonder how it's going to be," he mused. "This is the beginning of it, however it turns

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out. I've got all the creature comforts, that's certain. She's a pretty little woman, Mrs. Rose Tippet. There's something grows in the woods in the spring that's what she puts me in mind of. What's the name of it? Kind of sways when she talks to you. And that voice of hers certainly is sweet. It made me feel as if mine were all jagged on the edges. Well, well! Two hours and over before dinner time, and I'm used to twelve o'clock. I shall relish food by the time I get it. Now let's see how much of this ornamental dried work I can get off my clothes. There's a ring at the bell; maybe my trunk's come."

The captain was in his shirt-sleeves, one suspender slipped from its place, as he opened his door and stepped out into the hall; but as he leaned over the stair rail a slight sound caused him to look up, and, suddenly conscious of his appearance as reflected in the gaze of a very sharp pair of feminine eyes, he beat a hasty retreat, closing the door on his confusion.

"See here, Gid Bold," he said sternly, as he waited by his inner door-knob, listening for the

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welcome thump on the stairs which came at last, "I reckon you've got to remember where you are. You're not in your own home at Pelling, Vermont, you're in Mrs. Rose Tippet's Select Boarding-House. Now don't you forget it again."





CHAPTER III

WITH a good deal of trepidation Captain Bold made his toilet for his first dinner at 385 Walnut Street. Before it was completed his entire wardrobe was spread upon the bed and he had viewed each separate article with a disapproving eye.

"I'm no dandy," said the captain to himself, "but there's nothing select about my clothes. They don't seem to go right with this house and all its fine fixings. Take that pepper 'n' salt suit, now. Get me into that up home and Marilla felt as if I was 'most too dressed up for anything except the minister's coming to tea; and she searched me so with her eyes,

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looking for spots, after a meal, that I never took much real comfort in wearing it. But here! put me in that suit and set me down in one of those handsome chairs, and I'll look like an old Plymouth Rock strayed in from the hen-yard. I know my points; nobody need tell me what they are. I know that a man of my size has to derive most of his advantages of appearance from his outfit; if his clothes don't assist him he's nowhere, that is when he goes among strangers. My black suit is the best I can do."

He hung everything else in the closet and put on the black suit, having first donned a white shirt. The shirt had a plaited bosom, and there was something curious about it, to the captain's mind. At last he turned sidewise to get a different view of himself, and hastily removed his waistcoat.

"I never saw anything to beat that," he said, his face growing crimson as he looked again in the mirror. "Marilla'd been ironing her own clothes, and when I told her about coming off she was so upset she didn't sense what she was doing. Ironed every one of those plaits stand-

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ing up ridgewise, as I live ! the only white shirt I've got to my name that wasn't too much worn to bring. Well, sir, what's to be done about it ? I wonder if I were to put ——”

There was little time for delay. A glance at his watch showed the captain that dinner was only half an hour distant. Stepping briskly over to the chiffonier to the drawers of which he had consigned all his possessions which could not well be hung in the closet, he brought from the upper drawer two large silk handkerchiefs, one red, the other plum-colored ; these he unfolded and tied across his chest in hard knots, making each handkerchief cover as many of the upstart plaits as could be pressed under its folds.

“That ought to do something,” he said, surveying himself doubtfully. “ ’Twould do more if silk didn't slip so. Now for a necktie. Better make that kind of cheerful, seems to me, when there are ladies in the party. Here's the one Asa Dean gave me Christmas ; that's a tasty tie. Those rosebuds on a blue ground make me think of a dressing gown grandsire used to wear when I was a boy, but I guess they're all

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right. Wonder who selected it. If I thought 'twas Henry Gaynes 'twould never go 'round my neck, but probably 'twas that meek sister, his wife. Then, when I get off these silk ironing-boards, that'll look first rate."

When the sound of a Japanese gong reached the captain's ears, his fingers were engaged in untying the knots which had tightened under their strain and proved unexpectedly obstinate. He pulled and picked at them alternately ; at last the red one allowed itself to loosen slightly and its knot gave way. The plum-colored handkerchief, however, seemed possessed of the devil. The captain was growing desperate when there came a tap at his door.

"Come in !" he called, and turned to see a rosy Celtic face from which two eyes as merry as his own laughed at him, and to hear a soft Irish voice say :

"Would you be coming to dinner, Captain Bowld ? 'Tis ready."

"For the love of peace, girl, come here and get this contrivance off me," said the captain.

"What's your name ?"

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"Maggie Shannon is me name," said the girl as she stepped close to him and began a vigorous attack upon the knot. "Sure, 'tis a kind of a häärness you've got on, Captain Bowld. What were you afther doin' to yourself, sir?"

"Look at those tucks, girl, and don't ask foolish questions," came the answer after the captain had drawn in his breath to make his chest as narrow as possible, and between Maggie's work and his own the plum-colored handkerchief at last succumbed. "I believe to my soul they stand up worse than ever. I'm a pretty sight to go down-stairs and meet a parcel of strange folks!"

He looked ruefully at his image in the pier glass, but Maggie, hands on her hips, stood surveying him with a pleased smile.

"Never fear," she said with a bob of her head, "'tis your face they'll be looking at, not your shirt. If anny one gives a glance to that 'twill be Miss Rawson, her that has the room above you. There's nothing escapes her; she has eyes like gimlets, punching here, punching there; but pay no heed to her. To-morrow

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morning I'll show an iron to the front o' that shirt, and flatten out the plaits. Come now, sir ; gazing at it will make no difference."

Firmly though respectfully Maggie propelled him out of his own room and followed him along the hall to the head of the stairs.

"If Mrs. Hitchings has at you give her as good as she sends," she whispered, and with another bob of her head she left him.

The captain heard her feet clattering down a flight of stairs in the region beyond the door through which she had vanished. He straightened himself, drew in his chin, threw out his chest and descended the stairs. His ears were assailed by a feminine voice of strident quality, proclaiming something which he failed to catch but which evidently stirred up contention, as a babel of dissent followed.

"Sounds a good deal like Town Meeting," thought the captain, and the remembrance stiffened his wavering courage. He entered the parlor calmly and without haste and bore the introductions which followed with dignity and confidence. Four women and three men there

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were, beside his hostess, who performed the introductions, and the captain looked each and every one of them straight in the eye.

It was not a severe ordeal for a man who had many times been chairman of the reception committee for Memorial Day visitors. In his official capacity the captain had more than once received and presented to an audience the governor of his native state.

"Folks are only folks, no matter if they have on precious stones and all manner of trappings," he told himself, as he looked from the green glitter of a swaying ornament attached to the person of Mrs. Damon to the cold sheen of Mrs. Hitchings' gown. "Don't hide the wrinkles, nor the creases in their necks either," and his greeting to the two stout women was especially cordial as he felt rather sorry for them.

His rampant tucks had not escaped the eyes of Miss Rawson; he knew that, but smiled genially at her, recognizing them as the eyes which had seen him in his disarray.

"Here's a pretty piece of goods!" he thought

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as he was passed on to a slight, fair-haired girl, mentioned as Miss Temple, "and I'm not the only one to know it," as turning he saw the gaze of a pair of dark eyes riveted on Miss Temple's charming face.

"He's all gone over her," the captain told himself with glee, as after a brisk hand-shake from Mr. Corcoran and a limp clasp from Mr. Farnham he met the dark eyes of young Severance withdrawn from their late occupation so hastily that they seemed still to hold an image of rosy cheeks and wavy gold hair. "By George, there's love-making afoot, and I'm going to see it!"

"Shall we go in to dinner?" suggested Mrs. Tippet, as if it were not quite within her province to decide the matter.

"It is time—more than time," announced a voice which the captain recognized as having aroused opposition just before his entrance; it was the voice of Mrs. Hitchings, who now preceded Mrs. Tippet through the door and along the hall to the dining-room.

The captain found himself assigned to a seat

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between Miss Rawson and little Miss Temple. The delight which filled him at being next to the pretty young thing at his left was tempered by the presence of his neighbor on the right, and the fact that the massive and commanding Mrs. Hitchings occupied the seat directly opposite. He turned deliberately to Miss Temple with his second spoonful of soup.

"If you see me getting into trouble with the silverware, just give me a word, young lady," he said confidentially. "I'm left-handed, absent-minded and otherwise hampered by ignorance, and I'm liable to make mistakes. I shall depend on you to look out for me, now and then."

The steady gray eyes were most reassuring, the captain thought, as Miss Temple turned to him, half-smiling. They had a level, tranquil gaze which surprised as much as it pleased him.

"Pretty young to look like that," he said to himself. "The way you'd feel if a little pinky-white rosebud were to take the responsibility of the whole garden—blooms, weeds and all."

"You won't have a bit of trouble, I'm sure,"

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said the frank young voice that matched the gray eyes. "Things are very simple. But if you ever have any doubts, just watch Mrs. Hitchings. She stands for the Medes and Persians here."

"Does she now?" and the captain's mouth twitched in response to the demure half-smile on Miss Temple's lips. "Well, that's all right, I reckon, if Mrs. Tippet chooses to have it so."

"Chooses!" the word was softly spoken, but the captain had no difficulty in catching the tone, or the pitying glance that was sent to the head of the table where sat Mrs. Rose Tippet with the lean and sallow Mr. Farnham at her right, the stout and hungry Mrs. Damon at her left.

She looked sweet and gentle and very tired. She drooped in her chair as she cast first an anxious glance at Mr. Farnham, who seemed to find nothing to his taste, then at Mrs. Damon whose plate was heaped, but whose watchful eye never allowed the waitress to pass by until a liberal toll had been taken of whatever was in hand.

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"I bet she ate the late Damon out of house and home, and that Hitchings woman bossed her man out o' the world," thought the captain, but on the instant he was forced to readjust his views of the Damon household.

"What do you hear from your husband, Mrs. Damon?" inquired Miss Rawson. "I suppose you will feel that you must go out to him another fall. It must be very lonely for him out in that rough mining town."

Mrs. Damon's gaze was lowered, apparently fixed on the gem which swung just above her plate. She turned it carefully so that it caught and held a gleam from the chandelier which hung in dim splendor over the table. When she had adjusted the pendant to her satisfaction she raised her eyes and looked across at Miss Rawson.

"Another autumn is far away, my dear Miss Rawson," she said indifferently. "No one of us knows where she, or he, may be by that time."

"I'm glad you added the 'he,'" and Mr. Farnham pushed his plate from him. "If my

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digestion doesn't improve and my diet has to be cut closer and closer, the time will come when I shall find life isn't worth living; and it may come soon. Mrs. Tippet, will you kindly ring for Amanda to remove this lamb; the mint sauce ——" Mr. Farnham made a gesture which clearly indicated his distaste for what had been set before him, and pushed back his chair.

"If you will excuse me, I will take myself off to the smoking-room," he said, and rose.

"But I thought you particularly liked the mint sauce," said Mrs. Tippet, dismay vibrating through her soft voice. "I'm *so* sorry! I told Amanda to give you a special helping of it, for you eat so few things. Won't you stay for the salad? It's your ——"

Mr. Farnham waved away the mention of salad, and left the room hastily as if the very thought of it had been too much.

"He's a hateful man," said Miss Temple's voice, low but clear at the captain's elbow. "Nobody, not even an archangel, could tell what he'll like from one day to the next. Mrs.

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Tippett is a sweet thing, and she tries to please him, but she might as well give it up. Look at her now, worrying her heart out over that old dyspeptic."

The captain looked as bidden ; indeed, he had not waited for the bidding. Why did not some one of the others speak, he wondered. They were eating on as if nothing unpleasant had occurred.

"The trouble with him, Mrs. Tippett," said the captain, and then having secured her attention he began again, "trouble with him is he smokes too much. I can see that right away. Men of that thin, sallow make-up would be better off if they never touched tobacco. I'm something of a doctor myself, and I know the signs. If he doesn't use common sense he'll get his stomach all out of commission."

Mrs. Hitchings gave a deep, dry cough, patently manufactured to meet what she felt was a demand.

"What is going on in the financial world to-day, Mr. Corcoran?" she asked, bending a compelling gaze on her right-hand neighbor.

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The captain twisted his mouth and inserted a finger in his collar, running it around under his chin which he lifted twice. Then for the second time he heard the low clear voice at his elbow.

"May I trouble you for the salt, Captain Bold? Thank you so much;" and as he looked into the gray eyes, the lips of his neighbor formed another sentence.

"Don't let her scare you," read the captain. "Please don't."

"Scare me," said the captain in a low rumble, meant for a whisper; "let *her* scare me! Well, I guess not. You just wait a minute till I get my second wind."

But the talk had gone so far afield in the required minute that the captain sat listening with no chance to put in his valiant words. It seemed to him that he had much to learn in order to make himself a part of this new household and that little of it was worth learning.

"The stock-market? That's a pretty subject for ladies' talk," he thought as he listened to the sharp questions put to Mr. Corcoran by

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Mrs. Hitchings and Mrs. Damon. "And politics!" as Miss Rawson shot a remark across the table at Mr. Severance, whom it evidently hit in a sensitive spot. "And they're all so glib."

"I begin to feel as if I were tongue-tied," he said, turning for consolation to his pretty neighbor. "How does it happen you aren't engaging in these conversations, one or the other of them? Mrs. Tippet looks tired out, but you haven't that excuse," and the merry eyes twinkled at her.

"Why, it's like this," and little Miss Temple gave a soft laugh. "I haven't a share of stock or a bond to my name: all I know about is savings-banks, and not much about them. And as for politics—sh!" she laid her finger on her lips, and shook her head at him. "Mrs. Tippet and I are weak sisters—we aren't suffragists; the other three are, and Mrs. Hitchings and Miss Rawson are militant, that is, they're ready to be. Mrs. Damon hasn't quite decided whether she'd go as far as that."

"You don't mean to tell me!" said the cap-

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tain. "To think I've got right in amongst that kind of trouble when I came here for a quiet time. Will they try to draw me into it?"

Before Miss Temple could respond the captain heard the voice of his other neighbor at his ear, and turning hastily saw that Miss Rawson was looking at him with an eager air.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the captain. "I'm afraid you've asked me something that I didn't hear."

"I'm glad it was only that," boomed Mrs. Hitchings from across the table. "So many men try to hedge themselves about, and decline to express any opinion. Ask him again, Miss Rawson."

"I asked you, Captain Bold, where you stand on the question of equal suffrage?" and again Miss Rawson waited with her eager air.

"Well now, as to that," the captain paused, and his eyes sought the face of his hostess; a delicately troubled face it was for the moment, slightly flushed and with lifted eyebrows; he smiled at it, reassuringly, without regard to on-

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lookers. "As to that," he repeated, "I can't exactly say, ma'am."

"Why not?" asked Miss Rawson crisply. "It isn't possible that the burning question of the day has not been discussed in your home."

The captain faced her challenging gaze with a calmness more apparent than real. It was one thing to take the floor in Pelling, Vermont, where he was known and respected; quite another to take it here where he was yet to be weighed and measured, and that by standards for which he had no precedent. It was, however, not the time to falter, and he could see that little hedging would be allowed by his inquisitors. He might temporize for a moment.

"Well no, ma'am," he said, returning Miss Rawson's gaze with disarming frankness. "You see my Cousin Marilla, who keeps house for me, is a real home body; of course she reads our local sheet, *The Pelling Banner*, every day, but when the ladies come to see her the talk seems to be mostly connected with cooking receipts or dressmaking or what's going on in town; that is, to judge from the scraps I hear.

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Generally speaking, I clear out when there's a sewing circle on hand, or any such work. They don't want any men folks around, I know that."

Long before the captain had finished this innocent speech he knew it had failed to serve his purpose. Miss Rawson's lips opened before his own were fairly closed.

"I didn't refer to your house, Captain Bold," she said in a tone which brooked no trifling. "I referred to your town. Are there no women of public spirit in Pelling? If not, it is time they were awakened. I will send your cousin some literature at once."

"She's not much of a reader, ma'am," began the captain, but immediately he saw that joking was not in order, and subdued the twinkle in his eyes. "We've had one woman suffragist in our town," he said gravely, "but we haven't got her now."

"Ah!" breathed Mrs. Hitchings, across the table, and at his side Miss Rawson breathed another thinner but equally indignant "Ah!"

"A case of persecution, no doubt," said Mrs. Hitchings in her deepest tone.

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"No, ma'am," said the captain respectfully, "'twas a case of measles ; five cases, in fact ; the children caught 'em while she was down here attending some meetings, and their father was at home looking after them. They didn't have 'em all at once, but one after another, as sometimes happens ; the whole run lasted pretty nearly three months. The father hadn't watched 'em quite as close as a woman would, and they'd gone about wherever they pleased ; the youngest boy came pretty near dying, he was so sick ; they struck in with him."

"Do you mean to say that *measles* sufficed to make that woman change her belief in her own sex and its rights ?" demanded Mrs. Hitchings, while Miss Rawson breathed sharply, awaiting the answer.

"Well, I wouldn't put it that way exactly, ma'am," said the captain apologetically. "No, that wasn't the way of it. As I heard it, she said that 'twas very evident to her no man was capable of doing a woman's work, and as no day was long enough for a woman to do both his and her own, she thought on the whole he'd

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better be allowed to do what little he could by himself."

"Say now, that woman has the right idea," spluttered Mr. Corcoran who had nearly choked during the captain's recital. "You agree with me, don't you, Miss Temple? I don't need to ask Mrs. Tippet. I know her opinion."

"Mrs. Tippet's opinion is not yet fully formed," said Mrs. Hitchings, diverted for a moment from the captain. "As for Miss Temple, her position is incomprehensible to me. One would naturally suppose that as a teacher she would wish some breadth of view, some idea of progress, some ——"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Hitchings!" said young Severance, the blood mounting to his forehead. "That's a little too much, you know! Why, I met one of Miss Temple's ——"

"Please—please don't, Mr. Severance!" the clear young voice was low, but decided. "I'd much rather you wouldn't try to help me out. It isn't a bit necessary."

The crimson in his face deepened and he seized his glass of water, taking a long draught.

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"Very well," he said as he set down his glass, but although his tone was submissive enough the captain smiled, noting the angle at which the firm young jaw was held.

"She won't be able to shut him up that way many times, not if I'm any judge," and the captain hugged the thought. "Looks pretty sulky over it now. He'd like to draw his sword and slash that Hitchings woman into ribbons; that's the way he's feeling now, I can tell by the cut of his jib."

As the company left the table young Severance veered from his direct course to the door to intercept Miss Temple.

"Could you—couldn't you go with me to see 'As You Like It' to-night?" he asked the girl. "It's my turn to have the seats, and I'd—I'd like your help in making my criticism on Miss Vernon's 'Rosalind.' I'll have to write as discriminatingly as Gregory does, or they'll give me chance to that young Stimson who's just come on the paper. He has a sister, a corking girl they say, and last week when I was away he had the tickets and wrote a mighty clever

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notice of 'The Strugglers.' Can't you go and help me out?"

A little smile ran across the girl's face before she answered. Then she shook her head, slowly.

"I can't," she said. "Examination papers are my doom to-night. It's too bad I'm so valuable in two directions. Can't you"—she hesitated, and again the little smile ran across her face—"if you don't know a corking girl, and can't get me, why don't you ask our new boarder?" she half whispered. "You'd get some fresh ideas about Rosalind, unless I'm very much mistaken. And—I like him, don't you?"

With the gray eyes raised to his, young Severance was quite prepared to like everything and everybody.

"I'll do it," he said. "And—may I tell you about it to-morrow evening? That's my free night, you know. It can't be examination papers again; don't tell me anything so unfair."

"Oh, no, it isn't examination papers," said Miss Temple demurely. "It's the Parent-Teachers' Association."

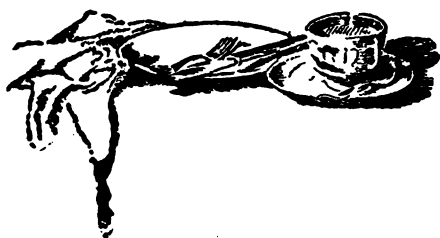
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"Where does it meet?" he demanded, "and how long does it last? I shall take you to it, and while it is in session I shall play billiards at the Foley House, and if you don't say the meeting will be over in an hour and a half at the outside, I shall hire a messenger boy to summon you with a telegram which I shall write. So now you know what to look for."

"Dear me," murmured Miss Temple as she stepped out into the hall and turned toward the stairs. "What a very determined young man you are."

"That's nothing to what I can be if I'm driven to it," said Jack Severance, nodding his head at her. "You needn't laugh!"

And then, inconsequently, he laughed with her.





CHAPTER IV

THE smoking-room was not large, but it had the advantage of being shut off from the hall by heavy sliding doors. As Mr. Corcoran opened these doors and ushered Captain Bold into the room, Mr. Farnham hastily pushed up both windows and the heavy blue air in which he had been sitting moved slowly out into the street.

“Man alive, you’re killing yourself, that’s what you’re doing!” cried the captain. “What d’you think lungs are made of that they can take in such an atmosphere as you’ve been sitting in and not rebel? ’Tis more than likely this is the whole root of the trouble

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with your stomach. Do you try this every evening ? ”

Mr. Farnham's sallow face was slightly tinged with green and the look he turned on this unwelcome questioner was a sour one.

“ I seldom have the opportunity,” he said. “ The other two gentlemen who are members of our delightful household are fresh-air cranks. It seemed to me this evening that I might grant myself the indulgence of a few moments' smoke with the mercury at a decent height. It will run down fast enough, you'll find. I will leave you to enjoy its rapid descent without the incubus of my society.”

“ Why, see here,” cried the captain, distressed at the result of his words, “ you're taking it all wrong! You —— Look here, does he often go off at half-cock like that ? ” he demanded of the broker, as the doors were sharply closed behind Mr. Farnham's departing figure. “ I —— Why, he acted as if I'd insulted him, sir. I reckon I'd better go after him.”

“ And I 'reckon' you'd better stay exactly where you are,” counseled Mr. Corcoran, as he

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lighted his cigar and laid his case open on the table. "Help yourself to one of those cigars, and tell me how you like it. It's a new brand I'm trying out. Take that armchair and make yourself comfortable; don't worry your head over that old dyspeptic who's had the sense to remove himself. Going to like our little town?"

"I spoke too quickly, as I often do," said the captain regretfully. He turned to the table and lifting the cigar case surveyed it with some doubt. "I'm more used to a pipe," he admitted, "and the barn is the only place Marilla lets me smoke it, but I'd like to try one of these, and will. This certainly is an easy chair. Mrs. Tippet's provided everything for comfort, hasn't she?"

Mr. Corcoran took his cigar from his mouth and sent a ring of smoke curling across the room.

"She's a sweet little woman," he said meditatively, "but she never was cut out for a boarding-house mistress. She doesn't know how to stand out against Grenadier Hitchings;

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you noticed her, of course. She keeps that mighty brain of hers at Mrs. Tippet's disposal; and Miss Rawson, the one next you with eyes that could bore right through cast iron, pokes and pries and interferes from morning till night. Poor little Mrs. Tippet is Southern born, bred to hospitality and gentleness and pleasure. The first is eating up her possible profits, the second is making her easy game for those who are ready to take advantage of her, and she doesn't get any of the third.

"She was married right out of the school-room to a smooth rascal, the black sheep of a fine family. He kept fairly straight while her father lived, but when he died Tippet used up all her money, ill-treated her and finally cleared out. I've been told on good authority that he died in a sanitorium two or three years ago, a while before she came North. But Miss Rawson seems to have doubts on that point. She's thrown out several hints to me on stair landings and other likely spots for imparting dark secrets, but I've always got away from her as soon as I could, and I've never told her

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that I know a man who came from Mrs. Tippet's home town. That Rawson has too much time on her hands; that's what plays the deuce with people—Leisure! Look at Farnham; would he have dyspepsia if he had to hike around the way I do and always have from a boy? Not much, he wouldn't. How do you like that cigar?"

In Pelling, Vermont, deliberation in speech was counted a sign of wisdom, and headlong utterance was discouraged. "Catch your breath and speak slow so I can understand what you're saying," the children heard again and again. The captain himself, who had never quite outgrown his youthful impetuosity, was nevertheless incapable of such leaping from point to point as his companion had just exhibited.

"See here," he said with a slowness which would have amazed his Cousin Marilla, "how d'you expect anybody's going to get in a word edgewise? You just bear in mind that I come from up state in Vermont. I haven't even dared take time to bite off the end of this cigar for fear I'd lose the thread of your discourse. If

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there was anything particular you wanted me to answer you'll have to go back to the beginning and start all over again. No offense, you understand," and the captain's eyes twinkled.

"I expect I do hit it off pretty lively," said Mr. Corcoran grinning; "comes of the Stock Exchange, and my business in general. May have noticed that I clip my words. Little old aunt I go to see every week says I do; says I'm getting worse and worse at it. She's one of the old school; pro-nounces ev-er-y syl-la-ble—about like that. Wouldn't do for me. But I like to hear her."

"Now look here," the captain leaned forward; "there's something I've always wanted to know. What's the need of all this hurry in your business? If every one of you should agree to go slow, why wouldn't it work out all right?"

"Go slow!" echoed the broker. "Go *slow*! on the Stock Exchange! Well, I guess you'd find yourself at the bottom of the heap inside of twenty-four hours, and fixed so you couldn't move to get anywhere else, what's more."

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"I was saying, how would it be if everybody went a mite slower," stated the captain patiently; "if they all agreed to, I mean."

The broker stared at him, then again he grinned.

"Say, you had too much dinner or something," he offered. "You ought to have moved 'round a bit instead of coming in here. Hullo, Severance, our new boarder would like to have the Stock Exchange conducted on a different plan. He'd like to have bids limited to about one a minute. How does that strike you?"

"Excellent idea," said the young man who had just entered the smoking-room. "I'd like to talk it over with you, Captain Bold, on the way to the theatre. I have tickets for 'As You Like It,' and Miss—er—it has been suggested that perhaps you would favor me with your company."

"I'd like to go first-rate," said the captain briskly. "The drama is one of the things I've planned to study somewhat during my stay in the city, so that when I go home I can help

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out the Pelling Dramatic League by a few suggestions—that is if they're willing to take them. I'd like to be able to tell Potter Greene of some other attitudes he could strike and Nellie Dakin wants to introduce some new songs into her parts. She's our leading lady, and has a sweet pretty voice that works into most every play by a little altering here and there."

"You are evidently the very person who ought to go with me to-night," said young Severance, "and it is time we started, a little more than time if anything."

"I'll be with you in a minute," said the captain, bounding up the stairs. "I'm used to hurrying, being a member of the fire-company. I ——"

For a moment he stopped and then, bounding on again, he reached the head of the stairs and ran along the hall to his own door. As he opened it he was hailed from above by the voice of Miss Rawson.

"Is there a fire?" she cried. "I'm sure that's what you said. Will you please ——"

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The captain flung open his door and from the chair nearest it seized the hat and coat which he had deposited there on his first entrance into the room. Without waiting for Miss Rawson to complete her sentence he roared a hearty answer as he gathered up his belongings.

"There's nothing the matter here, ma'am," he called. "I was speaking of my home."

"And have you heard there's a fire up in Pelling? Have you received a telegram?" cried Miss Rawson, and as the captain emerged from his room he saw that she had come half-way down the stairs.

"No, ma'am, nothing of the sort," he hastily vouchsafed her as he hurried along the hall, one arm inserted in its coat sleeve while the other searched frantically for its proper opening. "You'll have to excuse me. I'm in a great rush."

Before he had reached the lower hall Miss Rawson had descended to the second story and with an imperative wave of her hand over the stair railing she summoned Mr. Severance from his stand by the front door.

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"I know something is wrong," she said. "Where is the fire, Mr. Severance? I must know at once, for I have valuable papers. I am perfectly calm. Is it in the basement?"

"There is no fire, so far as I know," said Jack Severance. "Ready, captain? That's good," and the door closed behind them with something very near a slam.

"Banged it a little, didn't you?" inquired the captain as they set off at a brisk pace. "Does that woman live on the stairs? That seems to be where she spends considerable time, anyway."

"She's the sort I can't stand," said young Severance. "Hanging around to catch a word here and a look there, piecing things together, and making up a lot more to fill out. Old cat! Tell me if I'm walking too fast for you, captain. We have time enough now we're clear of the house."

"I can clip it along with the spryest of them," said the captain. "You needn't worry about me. But look here," and he stole a

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quick, sidelong glance up at his tall companion's face, "aren't you 'most too hard on Miss Rawson? Isn't she kind of lonely, and just trying to fill up with other people's stories, so long as she hasn't any of her own?"

"She fills up all right," said the young man. "Oh, well, let's forget her. Nice night, isn't it? You can't see quite as much sky at once here as up in your home, I suppose, but it's pretty, all the same. See that patch in between those two chimneys; that's thick enough with stars, isn't it?"

"By George, there's the Dipper!" cried the captain. "Now I've got my bearings, and know where I am. I've been all turned around ever since I got to the house this afternoon. If I'd walked from the depot I'd have been all right, but the man that drove the cab wanted to show me some new buildings, and he took a round-about course. Well, well, I'm glad enough to see the Dipper. I feel at home now."

"So you rode with the cab-driver," said young Severance. "Good enough. I hope Miss Rawson saw you."

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"Now that I think of it, I'll wager she did," chuckled the captain; "for there was somebody peeking out between the curtains of the front room on the third story. That's the room over mine, sure enough. Why, that's the same trick they play up in Pelling, when company's expected."

"You'll find there are more tricks than one common to the city and country," laughed the young man. "Have you ever seen a Shakespeare play well acted, captain? Because that's what you'll see to-night."

"I've never seen one acted any way, well or not," said the captain. "Up in Pelling there's one of our summer residents, Mrs. Gorham-Watts—spelled with a hyphen, you understand—well, she has suggested more than half a dozen times to the Dramatic League that they should tackle one of Shakespeare's plays—'Hamlet.' She claimed it would give great scope for the town talent, but Nellie Dakin declared she wouldn't play Ophelia for anybody. She said Ophelia was crossed in love and went crazy, and for her part she had no patience with

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such goings on. So there we were; Nellie's our leading lady, and we had to give it up."

"Silly thing!" laughed young Severance. "Her own head needs looking after, I should say."

"Well now, there's some excuse for her," said the captain. "You see everybody thought she liked the young man who married her cousin; he went 'round with Nellie for a couple of years and our folks thought they'd make a match of it, till the cousin came on a visit, with one of those floppy embroidered hats—pink, hers was. Well, sir, after she'd looked up at that young man from under the brim of her hat just once, Nellie's chance was nowhere. And she did lose flesh, there's no denying it. So you can see why she'd be sensitive about taking such a part as Ophelia. Why, are we here already? This isn't any part of a walk! And I was going to tell you about the Pelling Fire Company and how I'd come off without giving them any notice, and I'm supposed to be chief. I'll have to leave that for the walk home."

But on the way home Captain Bold had so

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much to say about "As You Like It" that the matter of the Pelling Fire Company was not even mentioned. In the theatre he had been silent most of the time, at intermissions waiting impatiently for the next act; breathing hard at exciting moments during the play and clapping till the palms of his hands tingled.

"Those two, Rosalind and Celia, are as nice girls as you'd want to see," he said at the end of the first act. "Just as nice as they can be, both of them. Yes, sir, there's mighty little choice between 'em, now is there?"

Later on he slightly modified his views and again turned to his companion.

"Two nice girls as ever were," he said, "but that Rosalind's the leader. She has more go to her than Celia when you come to sift it. Celia's more of a clinging vine—but they're a mighty nice pair."

On the way home Jack Severance drew from his companion various comments on the rest of the company.

"They were all good, of course," said the captain. "I shouldn't dare criticize them. I

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must say I didn't think much of the way Orlando kept one eye on the audience ; made it seem as if he was thinking all the time, ' This is nothing but a play ; let's see how they like the way I'm doing my part.' Now our Dramatic Leaguers know better than that. The Duke was good, although it did seem to me he needn't have moved around quite so much ; he wouldn't in real life. Touchstone suited me best, next to the two girls. I see they're going to give several more Shakespeare plays in the next few weeks and I mean to see them all. You've introduced me to a great pleasure, young man, and I thank you."





CHAPTER V

THAT night the dreams of Captain Bold were wild and adventurous beyond any other dreams that had visited him for many years. He woke several times and sat up, listening to the ceaseless murmur of the city.

“Never stops for a minute, day or night,” he said each time as he lay down again ; “up home if I heard that old blind that always fetches loose about this time of year, it’s the most I’d hear. Well—it takes all kinds of places to make up the world, just as it takes all kinds of folks.”

When morning had fairly come he lay awake, wondering what he should do with the day before him, and all the days after it. He had not made any definite plan as to the length of his stay or what measure of urging from the citizens of Pelling would be sufficient to call

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him home. On only one thing he had determined ; his visit to the city, begun in haste and wrath, must be made to justify itself in some way.

"There are things I can learn, anyhow," he told himself, rather wistfully ; "and there are things I can do, too, plenty of them ; and I'll make a friend or two, maybe. That pretty little teacher, and the young man who's in love with her ; she told him to take me to the play ; don't you suppose I knew that ? And then there's Mrs. Tippet. I'd like to be friends with her. She needs somebody to look after her ; she and Miss Temple both ought to be looked after, and not allowed to get tired out. This big house is an awful care for a little woman ; she hasn't color enough in her cheeks. I'll wager she doesn't get outdoors enough."

Not long after breakfast the captain set out for a walk and was overtaken by Jack Severance.

"Well, how does this happen ?" asked the captain, much pleased. "Miss Temple and I

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had breakfast together, and I concluded you'd had yours earlier and gone to work. I've been looking around in my room, but the chambermaid came in to tidy up, so I stepped down. I met Miss Rawson in the hall, but we only passed the time of day, for I put on the appearance of being in great haste; and now I haven't one single thing to do," and the captain looked hopefully at his new friend. "Are you in the same case?"

"No, it's about the hour I'm due at the office," said young Severance. "They'll give me some kind of assignment, but I don't know what."

He hesitated, looking down at the captain, then he said, rather slowly :

"Would you like to go along with me, if it's any place where I could take you?"

The captain smiled and shook his head. He had noticed both the hesitation and the slow speech, nevertheless he was grateful.

"Not this morning, thank you," he answered cheerfully. "I can find my way around in most places, and if I get lost there will be

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plenty of people to set me on the right track. First of all I must find a stationer's shop. Cousin Marilla would remember it against me the rest of her life if I didn't write her to-day, so she can tell the neighbors I'm safe and sound."

"I'll start you for the stationer's," said Jack Severance so promptly that the captain laughed.

"Took a load off your mind, didn't I?" he said. "I don't believe your little friend meant to have you tow me right along all the time. Land o' love, don't you suppose I see how 'tis with you? Don't waste your time playing at cross-purposes," he added, suddenly grave. "Don't let that pretty child get all tired out and a line between her eyebrows; make a home, no matter how small, and put her in it. She's one that's meant for a home."

"See here, Captain Bold," blurted Jack Severance, "you have no—er——" he looked at his companion with indignation which lessened as the blue eyes met his own.

"I shouldn't have spoken," said the captain quietly. "I beg your pardon. I've had no personal experience in matters of this kind, but

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I've seen years slip by and folks grow old waiting, and ——"

"It isn't any case of her waiting," interrupted Jack Severance. "It's—— You've got it all wrong!"

The captain held out his hand with his disarming smile.

"You'll excuse me, I know," he said. "And don't you let me keep you a minute more. This may be the very day appointed for you to show how well fitted you are to be head of a household. I see the stationer's ahead. Thank you and good-bye."

"What in the world made me answer him?" fumed young Severance as he went his way. "He's all right, but why didn't I hold my tongue and let him talk on, ass that I am! He's a good sort, but I needn't have turned myself inside out for his inspection."

Meanwhile Captain Bold with a smile lingering on his face walked slowly along toward the stationer's. Just before he reached it he saw a flight of steps which led to a little basement shop, the window of which was filled with an

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assortment of toys, picture books, neck-wear, ribbons and veils, and bore in gold letters the sign : "Miss Letty's Thread and Needle Shop."

The captain stopped and read the sign twice, aloud, the smile on his face broadening.

"Sounds kind of homey, doesn't it?" he said to a little girl who had paused beside him and was searching the window with eager eyes. She had a charming, dimpled face and spoke with an occasional lisp.

"It'th a lovely place," she confided to the captain. "My mother buyth all her thread and thingth here. Mith Letty keepth candy too. When she hath peanut candy there'th a placard in the window. It'th perfectly *thplendid* candy."

"Bless my heart, let's go down and see if there isn't some to-day," said the captain. "Miss Letty might have forgotten the placard for once, or the candy may have just arrived. She may be opening the box this very minute. You and I might be the first to get it."

"Let'th hurry!" cried the little girl and clattered down the steps, closely followed by the captain.

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A bell tinkled over their heads as they opened the door and entered the shop ; at its sound an elderly woman, tall and thin, with a gentle face and large, short-sighted eyes came toward them from the back of the shop, first carefully putting a strip of paper in the book she had been reading which it seemed to the captain she closed with reluctance. Her greeting, however, was cordial. The little girl was evidently a well-known customer.

"What can I do for you this morning, sir ?" she asked courteously, "or have you just come with Peggy to see the toys ? The peanut candy has not come to-day, Peggy. I'm sorry if you were counting on it."

"I'm thorry, too," said the little girl frankly. "But—oh, Mith Letty, might I look at the thquirrel once more ?"

"Surely you may," assented Miss Letty. "Perhaps your uncle would know of a purchaser for it."

Peggy turned, regarding the captain with a friendly smile.

"*He'th* not my uncle," she said. "He—we

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jutht looked in the window together, and then we came down to ask about the peanut candy."

"But we're friends, aren't we?" inquired the captain with an appearance of great anxiety. "We must all three be friends from this time on. I know your names, you see, Miss Letty and Peggy, and my name is Gideon Bold; Captain Gid, the folks up home call me. I'm a stranger here, and in need of friends; I hope you'll both adopt me right off."

Miss Letty was amused and a little bewildered, but small Peggy saw nothing unusual or in the least amiss in this suggestion. She laughed up at the captain, all her dimples in full play.

"Courth we will, won't we, Mith Letty?" she said and held out her little right hand which the captain gravely shook, afterward clasping Miss Letty's slender fingers across the counter.

"Now for the squirrel," said the captain; "but couldn't we watch him better if we were eating some of those chocolate candies? Suppose you put me up a pound of those in a box and leave the cover off for the present. That's right. But you don't charge enough for it,

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seems to me; I expected to pay city prices. How does it come to be so cheap?"

"It's home-made," said Miss Letty, "and I shouldn't feel right to charge any more; my niece makes it, and she hasn't great facilities. You see I have only a little shop, and I deal in small things in a small way. The squirrel is the only costly article I have, and I was over-persuaded by the man from whom I buy all my toys. I really believe he thought I'd be able to sell it right away, for he's a kind man and he knows how I'm situated with my mother an invalid. He wouldn't have urged me to put so much money into a single toy if he hadn't thought I'd make a good per cent. And I was fascinated with it; I'll admit that."

Miss Letty sighed as she went to her safe; she unlocked it and brought out an oblong box. With careful fingers she lifted from the box something wrapped in jeweler's cotton. Peggy's eyes grew larger and larger as she watched the unfolding and Captain Bold was conscious of a pleasant thrill of curiosity as a miniature stone wall was at last disclosed.

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“Jutht wait!” breathed Peggy at his side;
“jutht wait a minute!”

Miss Letty spread a square of green felt on the counter, and placed the little stone wall upon it. Then, taking a queerly shaped key from the box, she inserted it cautiously at the back of the toy and turned it slowly around. She did not speak, and her face wore a solemn look as if she were the priestess of some wonderful mystery. As she withdrew the key she gave one glance at the captain, then folded her arms and stood, her head bent forward, listening.

There was a soft whirr, and then to the sound of faint and fairy music there came out from one end of the miniature wall a tiny squirrel. He ran up the side of the little stones and along to the middle of the wall; there he stopped, sat up, moved his head back and forth, nibbled at a nut, dropped again, turned on the wall and ran back to his hiding place. Two minutes more and the wonderful toy was motionless and silent as when Miss Letty lifted it from the box.

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"I vum," said the captain, to whom the others had turned. "That beats anything ever I saw. I can't believe the little critter isn't alive. What do you suppose he's doing in there, hidden away? Eating?"

"There, that'th what I'm wondering all the time!" cried Peggy.

"What's the price, ma'am?" asked the captain. "There's a boy up country I'd like to have see that mighty well. 'Twould tickle him to pieces."

"I should be willing to sell it for just what it cost me, fifteen dollars," said Miss Letty. "I had hoped to sell it for a dollar or two more to some rich customers of mine who have a little lame daughter; but they suddenly went abroad to see if a famous German specialist can help the little girl, so she never saw the squirrel."

"Why don't you buy it?" asked Peggy of the captain with an engaging smile. "Then I could go to your houthe and see it, if it'th not too far away."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be quite a sensible

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thing," said the captain, "for me to put so much money into a toy for a boy that doesn't always know where his next suit of clothes is coming from. But I'd like to get it, ma'am, first-rate. If I should hear of a customer for it, I'll send him here, or what's still surer, I'll bring him myself. And I thank you very much for the pleasure you've given me. I suppose you aren't coming my way?" he asked Peggy who showed her dimples, shook her curly head, and settled herself more firmly on her high stool.

"I'm going to tthay a while longer," she told him. "Prob'ly I'll be here again to-morrow."

"That's a good hearing," said the captain; "'twouldn't surprise me a bit if I stopped in here to-morrow about this time. I may have found the very person who needs that squirrel. Good-bye."

"I like him," announced Peggy as the captain sprang up the steps, hat in hand until he reached the sidewalk.

"So do I," said Miss Letty, but as she carried

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her treasure back to the safe she sighed again.

"I wish I knew how many people have offered to find purchasers for you," she said apostrophizing the squirrel as she locked the safe. "You're a wonderful little creature, but 'twas a great piece of folly on my part to buy you. A great piece of folly. I ought to have put that money into homely old tape and elastic and bone hairpins. I've learned my lesson, but I've paid more than I could afford to for learning it, ten times over!"





CHAPTER VI

THERE was nothing to detain the captain at the stationer's beyond the time needed to make his modest purchases. The languid young woman who waited on him did not even feign an interest in the selection of pens and a penholder. She scarcely vouchsafed her customer a look when he said:

"I'm well supplied at home, of course, but I want to patronize the city while I'm in it."

"Not much conversation to be got out of her," said the captain as he stowed the package

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in a capacious pocket and stood irresolutely in the doorway.

"I've got plenty of time to go anywhere," he thought, as he walked slowly along, looking in the shop windows. "Catch me going back for luncheon with none of the other men there! Between the Hitchings woman and Miss Rawson, everything I know would be pried out o' me. I'm not proposing to tell my affairs to any one of them."

He stopped to look in at a florist's window where among other spring beauties two great bunches of many colored anemones were displayed.

"I don't know but I could let out a bit to Mrs. Rose Tippet," he thought, smiling to himself at the remembrance of her as she had sat at the breakfast table in a cool gown of lilac cotton. "Looks like the palest of those anemones, Mrs. Tippet does. Her hair's too heavy for her little head and makes it droop; but it's pretty, for all that."

He moved on, from one shop window to another, his hands clasped behind him,

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thoroughly enjoying all that he saw. Once a newsboy insinuated a morning paper into the clasped hands and then saucily demanded three cents.

"Three!" and the captain turned his keen though friendly gaze on the boy. "How long since you charged three cents for this, sonny?" and he brought the paper forward to look at it.

"Aw! I was only kiddin'!" cried the boy. "I thought you were asleep, and dreamin', mister. D' you want the p'yper?"

"I don't know but I'll take it, seeing you've had so much trouble," said the captain, drawing two pennies from a pocket which jingled whenever his finger touched it. "Is this your corner? I'm a stranger here, and bent on enlarging my acquaintance."

"Sure, this is my reg'lar place," said the boy. "You're a professor or something, ain't you?"

"I reckon I'm something," said Captain Bold, "but you see if you can't make a better guess next time. There's a man across the street trying to hail you."

The boy ran to his next customer and the

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captain moved on, but his hand went up to his jaw and lingered there, while an expression of discomfort crossed his face.

"My old silver tooth's setting in for a grumbling spell, true as you live!" he muttered. "And I swore next time she began to act I'd have the old filling hauled out and see where the trouble is. I'll wager 'twas those good chocolate creams that played the mischief with her. Well, now what's to be done? If she doesn't quiet down inside of five minutes I'll go to the nearest dentist; yes, sir, that's what I'll do. I'm not intending to have my visit spoiled right from the start by any lack of courage on my part, and if Doc Ransom wanted to keep my mouth work he ought to have used his influence on the drinking fountain vote. Ugh! there she goes, tuning up livelier than ever."

In a few minutes the captain's expression had altered so that little Peggy, his latest friend, would scarcely have recognized him. He walked disconsolately along, trying to imagine that the trouble grew less, but knowing full well that it rather waxed than waned.

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"Whew!" he muttered at last, his optimism conquered and overthrown by a pain which seemed to dance along his jaw, stabbing more deeply with every step. "I can't stand this!"

He stood for a moment perfectly still, his gaze fixed, unseeing, on a row of gilt names on a big black board at the entrance of a tall building. Suddenly, in the midst of a vicious stab of pain, he became aware that he was staring straight at a name which might help him to the comfort he sorely needed.

"Dental Studio, Robert Warner, D. M. D.," he read twice, and then throwing back his head he entered the building and crossed to the elevator.

"Business seems to be pretty slack with you," he said to the elevator boy, who rose in a leisurely manner from the seat on which he had been lounging, a newspaper in his hand. "I'm thinking of making a visit to Robert Warner D. M. D.'s Dental Studio, to let him take a look at one of my teeth. Do you know anything about him? Does he have much practice?"

"Couldn't tell you," said the boy, his hand on

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the door as if, having been disturbed, he was eager to be off. "He's been here only a few days. Better take a look at him yourself. Got a nice office."

"I don't care what kind of an office he has," growled the captain, rendered savage by incessant stabbing at his jaw. "Take me up there, quick as you can."

The boy slammed the door, and the car shot up, coming to a stop with a jar just before the roof was reached.

"Third door to your left," said the boy and the captain staggered out, clasping his anguished jaw.

The third door to the left proved to be ajar, and facing it sat a young man with a boyish, good-humored face. He sprang to his feet as the captain crossed the threshold, and the sufferer noted with a measure of satisfaction even in his pain that the dentist did not smile.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked solicitously.

"I don't know yet," mumbled the captain, as if afraid really to open his mouth. "My old

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silver tooth has tuned up within fifteen minutes and she's going it — Ouch!"

His face twisted with pain, and his eyes involuntarily closed.

"This way, sir, please," said the kind young voice, and the captain found himself relieved of his hat and coat, guided toward a chair and tilted backward with a gentle request to open his mouth.

"I see," remarked Roger Warner, D. M. D., as the captain's right index finger pointed out the source of his anguish. "And—yes, I think we can relieve that pressure without much trouble."

A moment's search for the right instrument while the captain held tight to the arms of the chair, another moment of pain—and then relief.

"Jiminy!" cried the captain. "You've stopped her! What have you done? You're a wizard, man!"

"No," said Dr. Warner, and that time he permitted himself a smile with which his grateful patient was in no mood to find fault. "I've

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only chipped off an edge of the silver which had worked away from the gum just enough to make a neat niche for such a bit of sweet as this little sliver of chocolate," and he displayed the mischief maker to the captain. "That was pressing on a sensitive spot."

"Well, is she safe now, or is there more that needs doing to make her all right?" questioned the captain.

The young man hesitated and colored.

"Why—I think your dentist will probably suggest a new filling when you go to him, and I'd go before very long if I were you," he said turning to his case of instruments. "I suppose you don't live here, from your coming to me to-day."

The captain's relief was so great that his face fairly beamed.

"I guess there are other ways you'd have known I don't belong in the city," he said. "But I'm going to be here some time, I don't know just how long. I came away from home dissatisfied with things and folks there, and I'm trying city ways and folks for a while. If

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you'd like to tackle my mouth work, do whatever needs to be done, why, go ahead. Look me over this morning—I don't know as I'd want anything done to-day, but you can start in to-morrow if you like. I'll have plenty of time on my hands. My name is Gideon Bold, Captain Gideon Bold, if you want it all, and I'm boarding at Mrs. Rose Tippet's, 385 Walnut Street. I came yesterday."

"I happen to know two people who live there," said Dr. Warner. "One is Jack Severance, a classmate in college. Have you seen him?"

"Seen him? Why, we walked along together this morning," said the captain, "and last night we went to one of Shakespeare's plays—'As You Like It.' Have you ever happened to see it? Have? Well, aren't there two as nice girls as ever you laid your eyes on in that play? But Rosalind is the one I'd choose every time."

The young man laughed and agreed with him.

"But you and Jack must have made great strides in friendship," he said, evidently

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amused. "He's apt to be slow in starting out with people."

The captain put his head on one side and looked at the young man with much the air of a wise, bright-eyed robin.

"There's more to that than just what appears," he said cautiously. "Did you ever—have you ever heard Mr. Severance speak of any young ladies he knows?"

"Dozens of them," said Dr. Warner promptly. "But I suppose you mean Ruth Temple, don't you? She's my cousin."

"I want to know!" and the captain held out his hand and wrung the young man's fingers. "Well, she's as pretty a little piece of goods as you'd see in a day's journey, and she's got that friend o' yours so he hardly knows which end he's walking on. He set out to take her to the play last night, but she fixed it so I was the one he took. She and I sit next each other at table, and I reckon we're going to be the best o' friends before we get through. We shall be if I have my way."

"You'll be friends," said the young man

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with conviction. "And you and Jack will be, too. He's a fine fellow. I've been engaged to his cousin, Jean Severance, for about a year."

"Engaged a year! Why in the world haven't you got married?" and then, remembering he was not at home in Pelling, Vermont, the captain clapped a hand over his mouth. "Excuse me. It's none of my business," he muttered from behind his fingers.

But although young Warner's brows were drawn together it seemed that he had no quarrel with the captain's words, only impatience with the circumstances that had beset his wooing and now delayed his marriage.

"The Severances all have money," he said, "and Jean and I both think I ought to prove we can live independently, not fall back on our fathers. But we couldn't live on what I've earned since I graduated from the Dental School last year—so we're waiting."

"I see," said the captain. "Well, that's all right."

"It's all right in theory," and Dr. Warner frowned thoughtfully, "but it isn't working

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out well. I can't drag people in here by the hair. I moved here because this building is in the centre of the shopping district, and women with children like to leave them at the dentist's while they shop. I had pretty good luck with children at the school—charity patients, but I've had just exactly two youngsters over my threshold since I set up practice for myself."

"So-o," said the captain, rubbing his chin as his gaze traveled the room. "I see you have some picture books for the children to look at. While they wait? Oh, I should have supposed you propped 'em up on that window ledge, open, while you worked and turned a page now and again. You try it."

The young man looked at him with growing interest.

"That's a first-rate idea," he said. "You like children, don't you?"

"Doesn't everybody like 'em?" challenged the captain. "I pity anybody that doesn't, if there are any such. I like 'em all sizes and kinds, clean or dirty. That's the way they run in Pelling, Vermont—and everywhere else."

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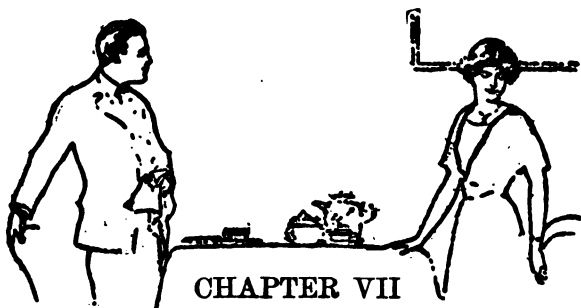
The captain's "mouth-work" had been mapped out, and he was bidding the young dentist good-bye when another idea came to him.

"There's something I'd like to have you see," he said eagerly. "When I get through my appointment to-morrow could you spare a few minutes to go with me to a little shop quite near to see a—a kind of a device that might interest you?"

For answer Dr. Warner turned toward his new patient a page perfectly blank save for a space on which was inscribed, "Captain Gideon Bold, 10 to 11 A. M."

"Looks as if you could," said the captain gravely. "Good! And I'll write Cousin Marilla about shipping down some of my maple-sugar as soon as it's ready. There never was a child born that didn't love Vermont maple-sugar. Good-day to you."





CHAPTER VII

WHEN the company met at dinner that night it seemed natural to the captain to expect that every one of Mrs. Rose Tippet's boarders would be as eager to hear the story of his first day in the city as he was to tell it. In Pelling, Vermont, the first impressions of a newcomer were sought and valued. "No doubt," thought the captain, "they'll all be waiting to hear what I have to say."

But his high hopes were doomed to perish. His long letter to Cousin Marilla—containing original abbreviations which after causing her a blinding headache still remained riddles—had been written and dispatched; he dressed for dinner in the shirt over the front of which Maggie had labored with a heavy and practiced

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hand, and descended the stairs to the sound of feminine voices interspersed with mutterings which he rightly surmised to be issuing from the throat of the irate Mr. Farnham. As the captain entered the dining-room these mutterings changed to an articulate growl.

"They ought to be spanked and put to bed, every one of them," were the words which greeted the captain, and as Mr. Farnham uttered them he glared first at Miss Rawson sitting beside him, very erect with a brilliant spot on each cheek-bone, and then across the table and down to Mrs. Hitchings' martial figure; on its way his gaze took in Mrs. Damon, who appeared to be on the verge of tears.

"May I ask, sir, if you would have the same rule apply to men who were endeavoring to obtain their just rights?" inquired Mrs. Hitchings in an ominous tone.

"Men never, to my knowledge, have shown themselves to be that particular kind of fool," growled Mr. Farnham, transferring his attention to his soup, which he regarded with a blighting gaze.

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The captain slipped into his seat, his cheerful "Good-evening, friends," unanswered save by Mrs. Tippet who smiled and murmured some words which were drowned in a burst of eloquence from Mrs. Hitchings.

"What's happened now, ma'am?" the captain asked desperately, at last, of Miss Rawson, for Ruth Temple was not in her seat. "I haven't read the papers to-day, I've been so busy otherwise."

"I can hardly conceive of such a thing in these days when events are crowding so thick and fast upon us," and Miss Rawson turned a condemnatory look upon her genial neighbor. "I feel that two papers a day are scarcely sufficient to keep me in touch with affairs here and in England. Mr. Farnham is pleased to refer in terms of contempt to the latest wonderful demonstration of our militant sisters across the water."

"Oh, well now, that's too bad," said the captain, trying to maintain a serious air in spite of his remembrance of Mr. Farnham's words. "I think, ma'am, it's 'most all the fault of the men, when you come right down to it."

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"Ah!" breathed Miss Rawson, with an air of triumph. "You see that point, man though you are."

"Why, yes," said the captain apologetically, "I can't help seeing it, ma'am. If the fathers and husbands and brothers and so on of those poor deluded ladies had treated them right, made home pleasant for them, given them a good share of their earnings and, generally speaking, cosseted them up, they wouldn't be out smashing windows and setting fire to mail-boxes and so on; stands to reason they don't *like* doing that kind of thing. Women are meant to be more gentle and clinging, and so they generally are if treated right."

"What!" boomed Mrs. Hitchings. "Do I strike you as a clinging person, Captain Bold?"

"No, ma'am," returned the captain promptly. "You certainly do not. But there are exceptions to that rule as well as all others. And even you, ma'am," gaining courage as he spoke, "even you don't look to me as if you'd set fire to a mail-box—not on purpose, that is."

There was a moment of silence, at the end of

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which Mrs. Hitchings removed her gaze from the captain and spoke, not to him.

"May I ask what you have to offer us in the way of meat this evening, Mrs. Tippet?"

The captain noted that her eyes were fastened on the waitress, who had stood open-mouthed listening to the conversation with which later on she would be expected to regale her associates below stairs. At Mrs. Hitchings' question she hastily advanced on that lady, seized the plate on which was left no scrap to show that it had held a noble portion of fish, and bore it to the butler's pantry.

"I think it will be necessary for you to speak to Amanda," Mrs. Hitchings said sepulchrally, turning toward Mrs. Tippet, but her voice carried its message to Amanda, whose back at once became aggressive.

"Yes, yes, I will." Mrs. Tippet's delicate eyebrows lifted and she looked distressed.

It was evident that Amanda's belligerence was all for Mrs. Hitchings, for the captain noted that when she served his mistress, last of all, the girl's big hard hand touched the

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slender one, and, as if by chance, gave it a little pat.

"Plague take that Hitchings woman; she ought to be the head of a reformatory instead of set down in the midst of a place like this," and the captain's wrath began to rise. "Taking away the poor little lady's appetite, reminding her of all the unpleasant things she's got to do; and stirring up the other boarders till they get almost violent in their talk. I don't know but I'll have to tackle her myself."

The captain's digestion was perfect; had it not been he might well have deemed it wise to eat little that evening. The talk ran from one troubled channel into another, and no one seemed to be in the best humor or disposed to make allowances for the opinion of any one else. Miss Rawson fought with Mr. Corcoran over the recent failure of a banker of whom she had never even heard previous to her perusal of the evening paper, but with the details of whose career she felt herself much better fitted to deal than Mr. Corcoran, who had known him since boyhood.

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Mr. Farnham attacked Mrs. Damon on the subject of equal suffrage, beating her best arguments to the ground with sledge-hammer statements which caused her glittering pendant to vibrate wildly more than once, and ended in her leaving the table with the murmured excuse of a headache. Thereupon Mrs. Hitchings moved up to her place and began a series of whispered commands to Mrs. Tippet which quickly put an end to whatever joy she might have been taking in a delicious pudding.

Young Severance came in late, glanced across the table at Miss Temple's vacant place, and after a nod to the captain, attended strictly to what was set before him.

"Looks almost savage with his jaw that way," reflected the captain who, while war was being waged across him between Miss Rawson and the banker, had no chance to speak. "And there goes Farnham, looking as if all his milk had been spilt and there wasn't another drop ever coming his way. Well, Gid Bold, I reckon the sooner you get out of this and connect with William Shakespeare's

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‘Romeo and Juliet,’ the better it’ll be for you.”

Whether it was partly the lack of companionship or entirely owing to the difference between the two plays, the captain was not quite equal to determine, but at all events he much preferred “As You Like It” to the story of the luckless lovers. As he walked home alone he shook himself half a dozen times as if he would rid his shoulders of an unwelcome burden.

“Think of that pretty, gay little Rosalind turning into that Juliet!” he muttered. “I’d go to-morrow night, just to take the taste out o’ my mouth if for nothing else. ‘Winter’s Tale’ is another cheerful one. You’re getting too old for tragedies, Gid.”

The next morning when he went down to breakfast Jack Severance was already there so full of good spirits that the captain cast a side glance toward the chair at his left, empty, but slightly pushed back, showing that it had been lately occupied.

“Miss Temple was awfully early this morning,” volunteered young Severance, ingenuously,

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his eyes meeting the captain's which had returned from their quizzical inspection of the empty chair. "She told me last evening she'd have to be off in good season, to meet one of her mothers."

"One of her mothers?" repeated the captain.

"I mean the mother of one of her pupils," laughed young Severance, to whose lips laughter was ready to come at a moment's notice that morning. "She told me about it last evening. She wasn't at dinner, perhaps you noticed."

"Yes," assented the captain drily, "I noticed that—and a number of other things."

The young man glanced at him, colored and lowered his voice, although Mrs. Tippet was talking to Mrs. Damon, and there was no one else in the room.

"I was surprised at first," he said, "because we had a tentative engagement for the evening, and I thought she'd forgotten it. But she hadn't. She had to take home one of her pupils who was ill, and the parents made her stay to dinner, and she went from their house to a meeting she'd told me about."

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"Too bad," said the captain. "I knew something had gone wrong."

"But she telephoned me," Jack Severance went on, "and I met her and brought her home, and then she played to me up in her little sitting-room. She plays like—well, I don't know a thing about the piano, really, I can just drum with one finger—but I'd rather hear her play than Paderewski. She doesn't like to have me say so, but it's the truth."

"Does she play any of the old songs?" asked the captain.

"Indeed she does, and all the new ones if you ask her to," said Jack Severance. "And you take her to an opera and she can play you all the airs next day."

"I'll be delighted to," said the captain ingenuously. "I'd like nothing better."

"Oh, well, what I meant was"—stammered the young man while the captain bent a grave face on the smelt which seemed loth to part from its bones—"what I meant was when anybody takes her."

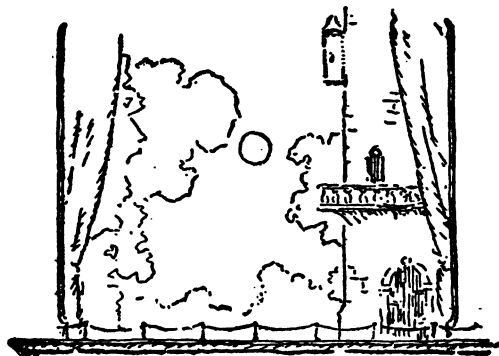
"Why, yes," the captain's tone was innocence itself, "that's what I supposed you meant."

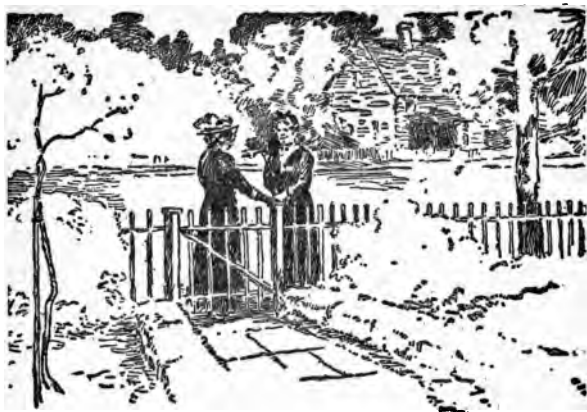
CAP'N GID

Well, I'm anybody, and I'll take her the very first night she'll go, when I've finished with William Shakespeare; and I'll ask Mrs. Tippet to go along. 'Twouldn't do her a bit of harm. If you didn't happen to have anything special to do you might join us. My party, you understand."

"I'll see that I don't have anything else to do when that party comes off," said Jack Severance. "I'll be right on hand, sir."

"Well and good," said the captain. "And afterward, when she's played me the airs, I'll give you my opinion of her musical talent. Now if there's anything left of this pesky little fish I'd better start in eating it before it's stone cold."





CHAPTER VIII

A LONG the main street of Pelling, Vermont, there strode a determined figure. Seeing the strong face and the swinging gait of Miss Marilla Bold there is no doubt that Mrs. Hitchings would at once have claimed her for a kindred soul; there, however, she would have made a grave mistake.

“I’m not saying I haven’t sympathy for the suffrage party,” Miss Marilla had stated to the new minister’s wife when questioned anxiously as to her views; “and I’m not prepared to say

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I'm an out and out anti ;—all I say is they're making too much fuss about it on both sides. You let 'em keep house for a man like Cousin Gid, and attend to all the things that none but the women can attend' to, and where they're going to squeeze in the time for politics is more than I can see. Cousin Gid wrote me in his letter yesterday that he's right in a hot-bed of contention over women's rights and wrongs. Well, I guess he can be trusted to keep out of it. He's a real tactful man."

The new minister's wife had agreed, although the evidences of Captain Gid's tact were not so clear to her as they might have been. She thought of him, in the recesses of her soul, as a hot-tempered, impulsive man who had stamped out of town before the new minister was fairly settled, leaving a large hole in the weekly collections which no one else seemed disposed to fill.

As Miss Marilla strode along she smiled to see approaching her a plump over-dressed woman whose face was slightly flushed.

"Now for it!" she told herself. "She's got

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me this time. Clear road and no escape for me. She's been looking for just this chance. Trust the Widow Mason !”

A moment later they were shaking hands with every evidence of cordiality, although if Captain Gid had been present at the meeting he would have recognized a certain quality in his Cousin Marilla's smile which always made him uneasy.

“And what do you hear from the traveler ?” asked the plump woman when the weather had been thoroughly discussed.

“Traveler ? Oh, you mean Cousin Gid,” said Miss Marilla with an air of sudden enlightenment. “I hadn't thought of him as a traveler because he's staying right in one spot, that is to say in one city ; though I'm bound to admit he seems to be going about there more than I ever supposed he would. Get him home here in Pelling with a good book and a pair of easy shoes, and I defy anybody to stir him out of an evening unless it's for something connected with the welfare of the town. I've often said to him, ‘Cousin Gid, why not step around to so-and-so's

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this evening ?' I've felt he was settling down too early in life, but land ! I needn't have worried, by what he writes me—and what he doesn't write," she added after a slight but noticeable pause.

"Has he made friends in the city ?" asked Mrs. Mason anxiously. "I shouldn't suppose he'd know anybody very well yet, short time as he's been gone. But you never can tell about men," and she gave a heavy sigh—and waited.

"Bless you, he doesn't have to go outside the doors of the house where he's boarding to find friends ready to hand," said Miss Marilla briskly. "There's a young man he's taken a great fancy to, and they've been to the theatre together and some other places ; and there's a pretty young teacher—you know Cousin Gid having been on the school-board so much he's always interested in teachers. This one sits next him at table, and I should judge he's all carried away with her. He says she has the sweetest voice and sunshiniest smile that ever he's heard and seen. Then there are two,

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three other women, nearer his own age, but years never make any difference to him, and a couple of older men."

Miss Marilla paused, adjusted her bag on her arm and made a movement as if she were about to say "Good-bye." She looked at Mrs. Mason with the smile which had been known to confuse her cousin, and the plump widow looked at her.

"Has he said anything special about the one who runs the house?" asked Mrs. Mason, allowing her eyes to wander beyond Miss Marilla and rest on a picket fence which offered nothing of interest to the casual observer.

Miss Marilla turned and looked at the fence herself.

"I didn't know but you'd sighted a new kind of bird, you seemed so interested," she said easily. "No, I don't remember that he's written anything special about her, not anything *very* special, that is."

"Probably she's like the general run of those who keep boarding-houses," said the widow after another pause, during which her eyes and those of Miss Marilla had met and held each other.

CAP'N GID

"Very likely," and now Miss Marilla was without doubt ready to move on. "Well, any time you feel like it just drop up the hill to see me. You haven't been there for—why, you haven't been there since Cousin Gid went away, and you used to be real sociable ; but there, you probably have a lot of things to do, same as I have, and the days slip away before we know it. You come when it seems best ; good-bye. I'm on my way to the post-office."

"There," said Miss Marilla to herself as she started briskly along, "I guess I've fixed her ! I'll wager she'll come panting up the hill to-morrow afternoon rather'n give me a chance to write Cousin Gid what I might. But I never saw anything like her for going right to the root of the matter. I know and she knows, and she knows that I know that the only person she need be afraid of undermining her chances is Mrs. Rose Tippet. She's talked with old Asa Dean and Mrs. Gaynes and the minister's wife and she's pieced everything together all neat and ready for use. She got the address out of Eddy Foss's mother first thing

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and for all I know she may have written Cousin Gid half a dozen times already. Much good it'll do her. I *know the signs*, and Cousin Gid is showing 'em plain !”

The letter which Miss Marilla posted to her cousin contained no reference to Mrs. Rose Tippet until the very end. It held quite a lengthy dissertation, however, on the love affairs of Ruth Temple and Jack Severance. The captain pondered over the sentences, whistling under his breath.

“The trouble with that pretty girl is she's too sure of him,” wrote Miss Marilla. “She thinks she can keep on with her teaching till she's good and ready to stop, meanwhile making him over by degrees, and then if she hasn't seen somebody else she likes better—and she won't—she'll marry him. That's the way girls are made. And the only thing for him to do is to get her just a mite jealous. It's all very well for the folks that write books to talk about not brushing off the bloom, and leaving the ‘sweet unconscious, half-awakened love’ to find itself ; there's nothing like another girl to

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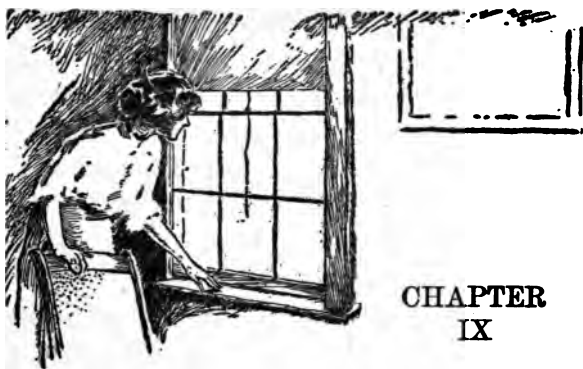
help out. You tell Mr. Severance that with my compliments. And you give my respects to Mrs. Rose Tippet and tell her that I'm real grateful to her for making things so pleasant for you. Take a woman of her age—I judge she's in her early thirties by what you said in your first letter—and she can be agreeable to a man twenty years older than she is without exciting any remarks. I expect she looks on you as real elderly, same as I should have at her time of life, and takes solid comfort in having a settled old bachelor like you in the house."

Miss Marilla had read these closing sentences twice over before she sealed her letter. She regarded them at the time as a masterpiece of art and suggestion and when she slipped the letter into the slit at the post-office after her encounter with the Widow Mason she felt a tingle of pride and satisfaction. "I did that pretty well," she thought, nodding to the post-mistress, "pretty well—and I expect to see my words bear fruit. There isn't a man in this world but what thinks he can manage his affairs without any help, and there isn't one out of a thousand

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of 'em but what has to be guided and prodded and boosted up to what's designed for him by Providence. I may have to follow up that letter by a good deal else, but it'll let a *little* light in on Cousin Gid, if I'm not mistaken."





CHAPTER IX

IT was about two weeks later that, going down to breakfast rather tired after an evening with "King Lear" and a night of confused dreams, Captain Bold received a smile of welcome from his pretty neighbor.

"Well, there, I didn't know as I was ever going to see you again," said the captain. "Just as soon shake hands with me? Thank you. Now this day's beginning right. Isn't examination time 'most over?"

"It's quite over for the present," laughed Ruth Temple, "and I've gone the rounds of the parents for luncheons and dinners, too. This is the season of the year when each one wishes to

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explain to me exactly why her child shouldn't be judged by the result of examinations. It's all very funny. Twice this week I've heard about you, Captain Bold."

"I want to know," and the captain beamed. "Let's see if I can guess. Been having the toothache lately?"

"No," she shook her head gaily. "But I met my cousin on the street yesterday, so one of your guesses is right. He says you've laid the corner stone of his fortune; gratitude and joy were written all over him."

"Pshaw!" but the captain looked as if this were pleasant news. "Have you seen his squirrel? I'll wager you never saw anything better calculated to please little folks than that is."

"I haven't seen it, but two of my pupils have," said Miss Temple; "and they are perfectly wild over it. One of them begged Robert to tell her mother she needed to have another tooth filled, so she might go again."

"That's good news," said the captain. "I like your cousin first-rate. He's talked to me sort of confidential—seeing what a regular old

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countryman I am—and he's made me feel at home ; same as Mr. Severance has," and the captain's sidelong glance noted with joy a faint blush. "I'm expecting we'll be real intimate soon. Who was the other person that knew me ? "

"It was two other people," said Miss Temple, as she pressed her napkin into its ring. "Miss Letty Grace and little Peggy Townsend. You seem to be making a good many firm friends in a very short time, Captain Bold. I thank you for the delightful footstool I found under my desk last night," she added as she rose from the table. "Mrs. Tippet told me who made it, and it's exactly the right size and height."

"'Twasn't anything to do ; didn't take but a few minutes," asserted the captain, beaming up at her. "I told Mrs. Tippet I wished she'd let me putter round a bit in the attic, see if there's any little job of mending I could find to do, and she'd happened to mention she must get you some kind of a footstool ; the materials were to hand, so I begged the privilege. 'Tisn't worth speaking of."

CAP'N GID

"Oh, yes it is," said Miss Temple, shaking her pretty head. "Don't belittle your work, sir. Perhaps you'll come up some evening and see how it looks."

"I'd like nothing better," said the captain heartily. "And while I think of it, will you go hear that new opera (I don't dare to pronounce it) with me some evening next week? I'm going to ask Mrs. Tippet and Mr. Severance. You will? That's first-rate."

"What in the world do you find to smile at on a morning like this, and at this time in the morning into the bargain?" demanded Mr. Farnham, as he entered. "That girl's always laughing, to be sure; but she's young, while you must be fully as old as I am."

"I reckon I'm older," answered the captain placidly. "At any rate I'm old enough to have learned that there's no more need of biting folks' heads off at half-past eight in the morning than at ten o'clock at night. What's brought you out of bed so early, friend?"

"Farnham doesn't like to be called a friend before noon," said Mr. Corcoran who entered

CAP'N GID

the room at the moment. "He feels much more like an enemy."

"I think I have never asked you to interpret my feelings, Mr. Corcoran," came from between thin, unsmiling lips.

"It isn't necessary, that's a fact," laughed the broker; "anybody could read 'em with one eye. Come along, Farnham, cheer up. A rainy morning like this we need every little ray of sunshine we can get. You be a little ray for us, there's a good fellow."

There was no reply save a scowl on the sallow face, and a quickly suppressed chuckle from the captain, who finished his breakfast in the best of humors, and then walked into the parlor to look out of the window and watch for the postman. This was one of his morning pleasures when it so happened that Mrs. Hitchings had not forestalled him, as unfortunately she had done more than once. Her method was not that pursued by Captain Bold, whose custom it was to stand in the window, between widely parted curtains, well in view of the passers-by.

Mrs. Hitchings arranged a loophole through

CAP'N GID

which she might see but could not be seen, and seated herself at some distance from the window. From this vantage ground, fully dressed for going out, she now greeted the captain.

"The postman is late," she stated in the deep voice to which he had not yet grown accustomed; when it boomed at him from the dusk of the telephone closet one day he had jumped and cried "Bless my soul!" which was far from pleasing to Mrs. Hitchings.

"Yes, ma'am, he seems to be," said the captain, retreating to the farther end of the room and taking up a large red book full of "Types of American Beauty."

"It is no question of seeming," the deep voice corrected and reproved him; "it is a question of fact."

"Yes, ma'am, I presume you're just about right," admitted her victim.

"I never permit myself to be 'just about right,'" returned Mrs. Hitchings in majestic disapproval. "I wish to be, and am, in small matters as in great ones, *exact*, sir."

The captain fled out into the hall.

CAP'N GID

"I wouldn't live with that woman, not for all you could give me," he muttered, as he hurried up-stairs. "I'll bet poor old Hitchings was glad to go to—wherever he went. Nothing could be worse than being tied for life to a woman that picks on you, manners, language, opinions and all, day in and day out, setting you right every few minutes."

At the head of the stairs he hesitated, for the sound of Maggie's voice, singing as she plied the carpet-sweeper, came to him from his own room.

"I declare, I don't know where to go," said the captain disconsolately. "I don't see what possessed me not to have that young Warner give me an appointment this morning. I feel lost without it; and little Peggy having told me she was going on a visit with her mother, there doesn't seem to be any good excuse for my trudging out in the rain to Miss Letty's. I believe I'll go up attic and look around; see if there isn't something I could mend."

As he hesitated, he heard the sharp slap of the letter box lid, and turning, saw half a dozen

CAP'N GID

letters shoot through the slit and down to the hall floor. He descended the stairs briskly, but Mrs. Hitchings was there before him.

"One for Mrs. Damon, from her husband," she said. "I will lay it here on the slab, as Mrs. Damon is dressing to go with me to the State House. One for Miss Rawson, who has already gone. I will leave that here, also. Two for me, one for you, Captain Bold, and one for Mrs. Tippet."

She looked at the last letter very closely, examining its stamp and address with a keen scrutiny which the captain resented.

"I think I will ——" she began slowly, but at that moment Mrs. Damon came hurrying down the stairs.

"I'm so sorry to be late," she panted, "but it's just one of the mornings when everything goes on wrong, and nothing will fasten, and three times I've caught my hair on hooks!"

"You do not allow yourself sufficient time," said Mrs. Hitchings, unmoved by this tale of trial, her eyes still on the letter in her hands.

"Is there any mail for me?" inquired Mrs.

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Damon, and the captain noted with satisfaction that she cast a covertly rebellious look at her martial friend.

"Feels just about the way I do," he thought, as Mrs. Damon received her letter and stuffed it into her bag, clicking it shut with a snap.

"I will place the letter for Mrs. Tippet here," and reluctantly Mrs. Hitchings laid it down. "She is very busy this morning, and doubtless would not spare the time to read it, if I were to ring for Amanda to take it to her. Good-morning, Captain Bold; I trust you will pass a profitable day."

"Well, now, it's nothing to you, marm, whether I do or don't," muttered the captain as the door closed, shutting out his view of the two intrepid women, setting forth in an easterly storm. "I'm going to ring that bell for Amanda myself. No reason Mrs. Tippet shouldn't have her letter and decide whether she wants to take time to read it or not."

When Amanda appeared the captain had a sudden thought quite worthy of his name.

"I'm going up attic," he said. "I'll take it

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to her and save you the stairs if you will tell me where she is."

"She is in the linen room, beside the attic," said Amanda gratefully. "And I give you thanks for taking it. You are a kind man. I will go again to my dishes, that are never ended in this house. The door of the linen room will be open."

Up three flights of stairs trudged the captain, pausing at the head of the last one to give a loud cough. A slight rustling sound accompanied by soft humming ceased as he coughed.

"I have a letter for you," said the captain, advancing to the door of the linen room which stood wide open as Amanda had prophesied.

Mrs. Tippet was seated in a low rocking-chair; strewn about her were sheets and towels, while on her lap were pillow-cases which she was measuring to be sure that she matched them in pairs. Her hair was slightly disordered; there were some little waving tendrils and soft curls of which Mrs. Hitchings would have sternly disapproved, but the captain regarded them with pleasure. In his eyes

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Mrs. Rose Tippet with a faint color in her cheeks, and slightly roughened hair, was a picture to be gazed at with appreciation, and an unwonted feeling of tenderness swept over him. She looked so gentle and so wistful as she took her letter from him with a word of thanks.

"Made to be taken care of, that's what she is," thought the captain, not for the first or second time.

"I expect you'd like to read it right off," he said, lingering for a moment, his own letter crumpled in his left hand. "I've had one, too, from my Cousin Marilla up home. It's full of news as a nut is of meat, I know that before I open it. I thought of stepping into the attic and looking around to see if you had anything that needed tinkering. Up home a day like this there are always some little odd jobs to be done, to keep my hands busy and my mind off the smell o' the salt. An east wind drives my thoughts seaward pretty strong, you see. May I take a look around and see if I can find anything that needs a little attention? The ladies

CAP'N GID

have all gone off to a suffrage meeting, or some sort of valiant doings, I take it," and the captain smiled at her as one who was on his side.

"There's a clock I've always been fond of; it came from Rose Court, my old home," said Mrs. Tippet, letting the pillow-cases slip unheeded to the floor as she rose. "I wonder—do you know about clocks, Captain Bold? Could you make one go that hadn't gone for years? Mrs. Hitchings says nothing can be done with it; she says she knows all about clocks, and she has shaken and shaken it, and tried it on different walls. She says it is because it was of Southern make, and not properly adjusted to stand the journey. But—but our dear old Zekiel, on whom my mother always relied for everything, packed it when I came away from home. I'm sure he would have been most careful."

"Has anybody that really knows—I mean have you had any expert look it over?" asked the captain. "You see, Mrs. Hitchings might have neglected some little thing that such a man would know about right off."

CAP'N GID

"Oh, no," and Mrs. Tippet's eyes were startled. "Mrs. Hitchings would not have liked it if I—if I hadn't trusted her judgment. Here is the clock."

They had entered the attic, and from a shelf Mrs. Tippet lifted down an old square clock, looking at it regretfully, but with loving eyes.

"Hasn't it a pretty picture at the top?" she asked. "I always loved that funny little winter scene with a bright sunset at one end and the full moon at the other. See; the weights are wound as tight as they can be; they're up at the very top. Here's the key on its old hook inside where it always hung—but it's of no use."

The captain inserted a cautious finger, poking it up as far as it would go. Suddenly he drew his mouth into a pucker, and glanced at Mrs. Tippet. At the moment she was gazing at a queer old vase, banished, like most of her girlhood belongings, at Mrs. Hitchings' command.

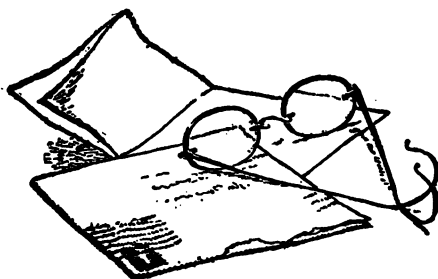
"M-m," said the captain, withdrawing his finger. "If I should succeed in getting it in order, could I claim an extra plateful of those

CAP'N GID

excellent griddle cakes to-morrow morning? provided, of course, Mrs. Hitchings wasn't on hand to see me get them."

"You shall have two extra platefuls, beside a heartful of thanks. Oh, I'd be so glad to hear it tick again!" said Mrs. Rose Tippet softly, as she left the captain and went back to her linen sorting.

"Eyes looked kind of misty," muttered the little man, as he opened a stout box and began his search for a desired tool. "Not a dimple in her face, like as not there never were any, and her smile's something like tears a good deal of the time, but there's a—there's a—— Ah! here's what I was looking for. Now let's see whether it's Hitchings or Bold that wins out this time."





CHAPTER X

MRS. HITCHINGS, raising her eyes from her soup-plate, sat, her spoon uplifted, gazing at the opposite wall.

"How—when did you have that clock set in order?" she asked, in her most majestic manner, turning to Mrs. Tippet. "Of course you have had new works. It must have been a very expensive performance. Did you think it wise, or necessary?"

"Isn't it a corker, though?" young Severance asked her, while Mrs. Tippet, extraordinarily undisturbed, smiled at his words. "We've all been waiting to see how long 'twould be before you'd notice it, you and

CAP'N GID

Mrs. Damon. Of course we know you've had a very busy day," and there was the faintest suggestion of surprise in the glance that rested for a second on the hats which, donned before breakfast, still graced the heads of their wearers, but in neither case at the angle designed by the milliner.

"We have had a busy day and a hard one," Mrs. Hitchings presumably addressed young Severance although her gaze was still fixed on the clock. "But its results will be, we feel sure, far-reaching and ennobling. It has been a day with no room for small thoughts or petty matters. May I ask, Mrs. Tippet, who made over your clock? Do you think you will care for it here in this room?"

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Hitchings, we're all delighted with it," said Mr. Corcoran, while the captain thought, "There! she's begun her work already!"

"The guests all seem pleased with it," and Mrs. Tippet's air was quite courageous. "Captain Bold says it is evidently a perfect time-keeper, just as it used to be—at home."

CAP'N GID

"Ah," and Mrs. Hitchings transferred her gaze to the captain, who met it calmly. "May I inquire whether you have made a study of clocks, and how you were able to repair this one, which was certainly in a most deplorable condition?"

"Well now, ma'am, it wasn't so bad as you thought," said the captain mildly, "not nearly so bad, in fact. I've never made any scientific study of clocks, but I've tinkered them and humored them and sat up with 'em as any man does that has a houseful of 'em. I never had to call in extra help to keep them in order. But with this old beauty of Mrs. Tippet's I didn't really have to exercise what powers I've cultivated. All I did was to take my smallest screw driver, unscrew the top, and pull out the nails that old 'Zekiel had put in to keep the weights and so forth in place during their journey."

Every eye was turned to Mrs. Hitchings now, and her expression was well worth noting. Seeing it the captain felt an uneasy sensation in the region of his spine.

CAP'N GID

"She'll make me pay for this some way," he thought, but his smile did not falter.

"You must be satisfied with the result of your morning's work," she said in her deepest tone, and turned abruptly to Mrs. Tippet. "Did you get your letter?" she asked. "The one that came in the first mail?"

Captain Bold had wondered about that letter, in spite of telling himself sternly that it was none of his business. When the clock was ticking steadily and he summoned Mrs. Tippet to hear it and give her commands as to where it should be placed, he was much troubled to see the unmistakable signs of tears. Searching his mind for comfort he had asked the privilege of reading her his letter from Cousin Marilla.

"There are things in it that I'd like to get your opinion on," he had said humbly. "I'm afraid maybe I'm a bit warped in my judgment, from circumstances, and I'd like to lay the matter before an unprejudiced person."

To his dismay Mrs. Rose Tippet caught her lower lip between her teeth, and it seemed to him a minute before she answered him.

CAP'N GID

"I—I'd be so glad to help you if I can," she said, quite steadily, but not looking at the captain, "but to-day," she was smoothing a pillow-slip which lay over her arm and he saw that her fingers trembled, "to-day I'm afraid I can't. I must go out in a few minutes to attend to some unexpected business, and—would to-morrow do, Captain Bold, or would that be too late? I am afraid my opinion will be worth very little. I am not at all clever, you know."

"Your opinion is the one I want," said the captain stubbornly; "yours will be plenty clever enough for me, and to-morrow will do just as well as to-day—better, most likely, for I'll have done some thinking in the meantime, and got my ideas sorted out. Now you just say the word where this timepiece is to be put and I won't trouble you another minute."

She had looked at him then, so gratefully that the captain felt a curious sensation at the back of his throat.

"Poor little thing!" he muttered as he followed her to the dining-room, and again as he tapped the wall for suitable spots to place his

CAP'N GID

screws. "Poor little woman! I'd like to know who or what's making trouble for her! I'd like," and the captain's mouth was twisted as he bored the first hole, "I'd—like—to—see him—or her—there!"

The same desire came to him again as he looked at her, flushing under the keen eyes of her inquisitor, that evening.

"Drat that Hitchings woman, why can't she let the poor little soul alone?" he said to himself, and straightened in his chair.

"Speaking of clocks and other inventions," he said so loud that Mrs. Hitchings involuntarily turned to look at him, "we have something up in Pelling, Vermont, that would be hard to match. It's a clock that's run for two hundred years without ever missing an hour. Yes, ma'am, that's the truth."

Mrs. Hitchings fixed him with an unbelieving eye.

"How was the necessary cleaning attended to?" she boomed.

"'Twas all done between striking times," said the captain, charmed with the success of his

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bait. "You see she belonged to old Squire Hargood's grandsire, and the men folks from generation to generation have made it a matter of conscience to keep the old eight-day in order, so her record wouldn't be broken. There's a special kind of feather the Hargoods have always used for oiling her, and they use it to this day ; and they've got a miniature blower that they blow out every speck of dust with. She isn't so much to look at as some, but she's a regular wonder for time."

"Why do you call a clock 'she' ?" asked Mrs. Hitchings.

The captain had stolen a glance at Mrs. Tippet and had seen that, taking advantage of the diversion, she had pushed her chair a little away from the table.

"Why, I don't know as I could give any good reason," he said slowly, and with apparent reluctance. "You see anything that you have to coax and humor and er—there, I guess I've put my foot in it !" and the captain bent his head to meet the oncoming storm with joy, as Mrs. Rose Tippet slipped unhindered from her place.

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When Mrs. Hitchings had finished what she had to say and Miss Rawson had added a few stinging words, there was a pause, and Amanda, proffering *charlotte russe*, was sharply interrogated.

"Where is your mistress?" demanded Mrs. Hitchings.

"She has a headache and she goes to lie down," said Amanda clearly, "and she said would the company please excuse her."

"I will go to her room as soon as I have finished my dinner," said Mrs. Hitchings.

She was firm, but Amanda was firmer. She met the enemy without fear.

"Maggie is looking out for her," she announced so that all might hear, "and will attend to keeping her quiet. Her door is locked."

In majestic silence Mrs. Hitchings gazed at her. Amanda's shoulders twitched and her eyes snapped as she went her way around the table.

"A very saucy creature, that Swede," came from Mrs. Hitchings, just before Amanda passed out of hearing. "I shall speak to Mrs. Tippet tomorrow about having her dismissed at once."

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"I pray heaven that you'll do nothing of the sort," snapped Mr. Farnham ; "that girl makes the coffee, I'm told, and it's the one perfectly satisfactory thing here, to my mind. I trust you won't let a small personal grudge affect the comfort of the whole household."

Once more a majestic silence enveloped Mrs. Hitchings, and while it endured chairs were hastily shoved back and their occupants with one excuse or another left the room.

"You aren't strong on evasion, are you?" and Mr. Farnham looked at the captain as if for the first time he derived some pleasure from the sight. "Your remarks about the feminine gender—I couldn't have done better if I'd been bent on making trouble."

The captain looked the picture of innocence as he surveyed the pleased face of the dyspeptic.

"I wasn't calculating on making trouble," he said mildly ; "you don't think it'll be serious, do you?"

The semblance of a smile broadened the thin, sallow face.

"Serious," and there came the unwonted

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sound of a laugh ; " oh, it won't be so serious but what they'll keep on speaking to you."

And as Mr. Farnham, still grimly smiling, crossed the hall the captain, turning, found on Mr. Corcoran's face an expression that matched his own feeling ; and as the broker's left eyelid drooped the captain's right eye was momentarily veiled.

" I don't know but I'll take a hack at Shakespeare myself," said Mr. Corcoran, " if you'll let me go along. What's the play to-night ?"

" ' All's Well that Ends Well,' " said the captain, " and I'd be pleased to have your company."





CHAPTER XI

IT was indeed fortunate for Captain Gideon Bold that the continued storm of rain and wind made it natural enough to spend part of the next day indoors, while a suffrage meeting of great interest carried Mrs. Hitchings, Mrs. Damon and Miss Rawson out of the house soon after breakfast.

It was about ten o'clock when the captain descended from the attic where he had been busy for an hour, and seeing that the door of Mrs. Tippet's little sitting-room stood ajar, ventured to knock on it.

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"I'm mending, you see ; come right in," said Mrs. Tippet from the low chair in which she sat, her lap full of table-napkins. "I don't understand *how* these wear out so fast. Just look at that hole," and she held a napkin toward him. "What can make such holes ?"

"Looks to me as if Mrs. Hitchings might have bitten it out," said the captain after a grave inspection. "Where's the material that was there gone, unless somebody's chewed it up ? Don't keep a dog, do you ? I haven't seen one around anywhere."

"No, Mrs. Hitchings said I mustn't in a house like this," and Mrs. Tippet looked wistfully past the captain out of the window. "I'd had a dog from my home days, a Gordon setter—Jim. He was a darling. I gave him away—and I've missed him every day since. Perhaps you think that's foolish."

"Foolish ? Nothing of the sort," the captain shook the thought from him so vigorously that his chair complained with a loud creak. "No better friends in this world than dogs ! I lost mine six months ago, and I've mourned him

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sincerely. Haven't been able to make up my mind to replace him, not yet. He had pneumonia and died; that was the way he went, poor old Roy! Well, well, I mustn't talk over past troubles. You have plenty on your hands as it is. May I read you the letter I spoke of? Thank you."

The captain adjusted his glasses and took the crisp, crackling sheets—three of them—from their envelope.

"I don't know where Cousin Marilla gets this paper," he said ruminatively. "It doesn't seem to hold much ink. There are parts of the words I have to guess at, as best I can. I have about as hard a time with them as she has with my abbreviations. Here's the part of the letter I want to read you.

"I am glad you are having such a pleasant time. I should have answered your last letter sooner if I hadn't been so busy. The Hillside Gleaners have met here within a week; last Friday they came and you know what *that* means.' I do," interpolated the captain—"ah-hum—' what that means, and the minister and

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his wife have been here to tea. Their tastes aren't a bit similar, as I've noticed and spoken of before.'—That's so," murmured the captain, "she has, more than once. 'It seems to me they ought to have thought of that when they began to court. It makes it dreadfully hard for the folks that entertain them, his not wanting any sugar, scarcely, and her liking everything sweetened way up. Well, at any rate they said they had a good time, and I've got about rested from it now. 'Twas last Tuesday night they came, and while they were here they spoke about you and that business of the drinking fountain.

" 'It seems they've all begun to back down, Henry Gaynes at the head of the line. If there should be another Town Meeting called, as some say might be done, I believe they'd vote to accept your plan and put you head of the committee as they've done in times past. I understand they're short of funds, and '—the rest of it doesn't matter," and the captain folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope. "Now what would you advise me to do?"

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"Why, I don't understand," and Mrs. Tippet's delicate eyebrows were raised in perplexity. "Is it a question of your going home, Captain Bold?"

"Yes, that's it, that's the question," said the captain. "Shall I run back, as if the minute they were willing to do as I said I'd got over being mad, or shall I stop away a while longer and let it sink in on them that there's a principle involved? I've been away over three weeks."

"What is the principle, please?" asked Mrs. Tippet gently.

"The principle is—the principle," the captain's voice faltered; all at once his bubble of innocent conceit, pricked by the simple question, collapsed. "There isn't any principle," he said slowly, "excepting that I'm older than most of them and used to having my own way. It's time somebody spoke to me just as you have."

"Oh, but I didn't know—I'm sure there is much more to be said on your side," and Mrs. Tippet smiled at him kindly. "I've heard of

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some of the things you have done since you came here, Captain Bold, and I know how you've helped me. I'm sure your home town has had every reason to give you its trust and gratitude. And they wouldn't put the drinking fountain in the place you suggested? How foolish of them!"

"Right out in the middle of the road, where there isn't a sign of shade, they're bound to put it," said the captain. "An awfully hot place for man and beast. And 'tisin't just this time; I had to fight till I was 'most worn out to keep them from appropriating money to have the old portraits of Pelling' men that hang in the Town Hall copied in crayons by a man from Connecticut who came around and got a lot of folks to part from their money in exchange for staring likenesses of their grandparents. And I came near having a fit of sickness over the Library appropriation; they wanted to tie it up so that the trustees couldn't use it for any purpose but heating. I pointed out to them that if the winter proved to be mild, and less coal was needed, there were some other things

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the Library could have as well as not, but I had to keep pointing it out till I was hoarse as a crow."

"It seems to me they haven't been without you long enough," said Mrs. Tippetts slowly. "I feel quite sure of that. They need more discipline, I think. And yet—I can't see how any one with a home can bear to stay in a boarding-house."

"Nonsense! Come now!" Captain Bold had the air of one heartening a wistful little girl. "This is no ordinary boarding-house. Not that I've ever been in one to stay before, but I've heard a lot about them. Why, that room of mine has all the comforts anybody could want; it's warm and light and big."

"And lonely, sometimes," added Mrs. Tippetts. "You can't help missing your lifelong friends, and your home."

"I'm having a splendid time," said the captain stoutly. "Of course I get to thinking once in a while; anybody does."

"Yes, anybody does," said Mrs. Tippetts softly.

"But let me tell you something," said the

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captain. "It's a thing I never speak of—but—why, up home sometimes I get to thinking, too, thinking of the sea, and my old boat and—but there, it's my home, Pelling is, so I put the other thoughts away. I can do it, most always."

"I shall be very sorry to have you go," said Mrs. Tippet with a little sigh.

The captain glanced at her graceful head bent over the mending basket. It disturbed him to have something said by Mr. Farnham come into his mind just then.

"You're a regular gold-mine," the dyspeptic had told him with a sardonic grin. "Between having the best room at a stiff price and doing carpentry and upholstering free of charge, and taking the landlady and her guests to entertainments, you're a valuable addition to any household."

"I needn't have taken the room if I hadn't wanted it," the captain had answered quickly, "and so far all my landlady has been willing to go to is one short operetta. The little tinkering I'm allowed to do is a great pleasure."

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But even now he hated to remember the sound of Mr. Farnham's laugh.

"If I should decide to go, no doubt there would be half a dozen desirable parties after the room as soon as my plans were known," he said with eyes on Mrs. Tippet's face.

She shook her head but her glance met the captain's frankly.

"No," she said, "I'm afraid not. You see the price of the room is high, but Mrs. Hitchings says I must not let it for any less; she says it would lower the tone of the house."

The captain opened and shut his mouth twice, with commendable self-control. He opened it for the third time and his wrath exploded.

"You'll have to excuse me, Mrs. Tippet, but I can't abide that woman! What business is it of hers, anyway?" The captain's face was dull red and he fairly bristled with indignation as he shot out the question.

Mrs. Tippet looked at him, hesitated for a moment and then turning her face quite away as she bent over the mending basket, she answered him.

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"Mrs. Hitchings has lent me money," she said quietly; "she offered it freely, to start me in this business. When I first met her I had come here to find some sort of work. Mrs. Hitchings was boarding at the house to which I had been sent. She is a woman of large experience and ample means, and she was not contented in that house; she doesn't wish the care of a home; she saw the opportunity for me, and gave it to me."

"She wouldn't be contented in any house unless 'twas an asylum for the feeble-minded, and she was in full charge," grumbled the captain. "I'll wager she saw the opportunity—for herself."

"Do you mean she found one feeble-minded person?" and Mrs. Tippet's lips curved into a real smile that delighted her visitor.

"You know I don't mean anything of the sort," he chuckled. "But you must know you're too easy-going and sweet-tempered and ——"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Tippet," came Amanda's voice following a loud rap on the door, "can I have them napkins now?"

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"I'd better be going," said the captain rising hurriedly. "Thank you for your advice. I shan't make any change at present."

"I was putting it pretty strong," he muttered as he mounted the stairs to his room. "If I'd said one-third as much as that to the Widow Mason I'd have been an engaged man inside of five minutes, and then where would Cousin Marilla have been? I owe her a home, after all the years she's taken care of me, and she hasn't another place to go, and she wouldn't brook another woman on the place. Not that Mrs. Tippet is like anybody else. She's so ——"

The captain stood in the middle of his room, his coat on, hat in hand, while his mind dwelt on the various ways in which Mrs. Rose Tippet charmed the eye and warmed the heart. Suddenly he caught sight of his own reflection in the mirror.

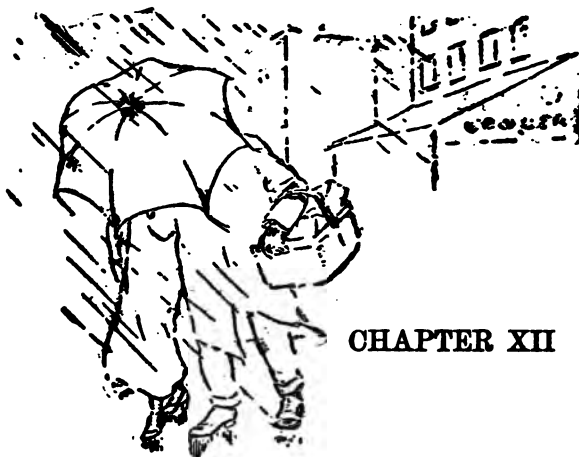
"Bah!" he muttered, turning away. "She wouldn't look at me even if I were a marrying man. The reason she's kind and sweet to me is because I'm such a countryman she dares to,

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knowing I won't take advantage. Well, I won't, so there's an end of that. And next good chance I get I'll tell her a bit more about Marilla, how she's dependent on me, and so on, and mention that I'd never think of making any change, on Marilla's account. Then when it's all clear to her she'll feel free to accept an invitation from me, now and then, with the young folks, knowing it's a kindness to me. By George, I'd like to know what made her cry yesterday. I emptied my pocket inside out, and never got so much as a look at hers!"

Regardless of the instructions in his Cousin Marilla's Book of Etiquette he jammed his hat down over his forehead and strode down the stairs and out into the cooling dampness of the street.





CHAPTER XII

"ISN'T there something I can do to help out this morning?" asked the captain. "I'm not going to the dentist's to-day, and it isn't much of a morning to walk, with this steady rain coming down. I'd like to be of service indoors if I could. Can't you set me to work? It seems to me we're having our full share of spring rains."

He stood in the doorway of Mrs. Tippet's sitting-room. Mrs. Tippet herself was pinning on her hat and had an air of haste; evidently he would not be asked to sit down; he

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slipped a couple of letters into his pocket with a twinge of regret.

"I have to go down to the market on a very disagreeable errand," said Mrs. Tippet, "and I'm sorry, Captain Bold, but I can't think of anything more for you to do. You see you've done so much already. There isn't a tottering chair leg or a spleeny clock left in the house, thanks to you. I only wish I could set the marketman to rights as you have done with the house."

"Haven't done a thing but what every countryman does in his own home unless he's an incompetent," said the captain. "And for that matter, why can't I attend to the market difficulty? I'm going right along with you. I'd like nothing better than a little set-to with somebody; it'll take the chill out of the air."

"But you said it wasn't a good morning to walk," demurred Mrs. Tippet, "and it is a long walk to the market."

"The longer the better," asserted the captain. "It's one thing to start out to walk because you've nothing else to do, and it's quite

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another thing to walk with an object in view, and a good one at that. I'll have my coat down here in a minute, and an umbrella ; you won't need to carry one ; mine is big enough for two."

As he hurried up-stairs the captain was conscious that it was not the object in view at the end of the walk which gave him such a brisk and cheerful feeling ; it was the very feminine object in a brown rainy-day suit and a hat with a long plume curling against red-gold hair.

"Poor little thing," he said to himself as he put on his coat. "Needs somebody to look after her. This is a hard world for a woman left alone. It's the duty of every man to help them out whenever he can—that is, in reason."

His reservation had nothing to do with Mrs. Rose Tippet with whom a few moments later he was avoiding the puddles, and whose brown suit and hat he was gallantly shielding ; it was entirely concerned with Mrs. Dora Mason of Pelling, Vermont, from whom he had that morning received one of the two letters consigned to his pocket.

The unregenerate marketman who had been

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sending tough meat to 385 Walnut Street was speedily brought to book by the captain.

"You let me attend to him, please. Dealing with an unprincipled man is no work for a lady," he said, and had firmly set aside all the objections Mrs. Tippetts could offer.

"I've had to do it for a year and a half, Captain Bold," she told him.

"All the more reason you should not have it to do now," and such was the finality of his tone that she said no more.

"I'm one of Mrs. Tippetts's boarders," the captain said bluntly, "and I want to know what you mean by sending her inferior meat and charging her the price for the very best quality? I'm not only one of her boarders, my man, but I'm a justice of the peace as well. There's a name for what you've been doing. Would you care to hear it and what's liable to happen when a man deserves it, or shall we give you another chance?"

The marketman's apologies and explanations were so abject and profuse that at last Mrs. Tippetts's boarder stopped them.

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"Your customer is for giving you another trial and letting the past go, I see," said the captain, who must certainly have been versed in the language of backs, as Mrs. Rose Tippet's face had been turned away from the marketman and her valiant boarder for some moments. "Now what can you do to-day to make amends?"

"There's a beautiful roast here, sir," said the marketman, "but the team's gone, and ——"

"Wrap it up and I'll take it," commanded the captain and a moment later he announced himself ready to depart.

"You'll have no more trouble with that man," he said as he unfurled his umbrella and adjusted the bundle at a comfortable angle. "There's nothing like a mention of the law to a tradesman who's indulging in a little sharp practice. He has a large family, he tells me, and he's been trying to make money too fast. He'll be all right now. Any more errands on hand? I'm just in the spirit."

"No more errands, thank you," said Mrs. Tippet. "I'm ashamed to think I let you fight

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this battle for me. I begin to feel as if I were really what Ruth Temple calls herself and me, a 'weak sister.' "

"Nothing of the sort," said the captain. "Why, up home I'm in the habit of helping out in all such ways whenever there's a chance. I have a letter in my pocket this minute from a woman asking me to attend to something for her that is forty times worse than threatening a marketman with the processes of law. I've a mind to tell you about it; in fact I had intended to read you the letter and ask your advice if I hadn't found you so full of business this morning."

"Won't you tell me about it?" asked Mrs. Tippet, as the captain paused and glanced hopefully at her. "Although, as you know, my advice is not rated highly."

"'Tis by me," said the captain. "It's like this; the one who wrote me is a widow with one son, a kind of a wild boy, and she wants me to write him a letter telling him how he's breaking his mother's heart and saying that I know what he needs is a man's guiding hand,

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and that as soon as I get home to Pelling—and she'd like to know when that will be, she says—I will try to keep him in sight and exercise a good influence over him.”

The corners of Mrs. Rose Tippet's mouth were twitching.

“What would you like my advice about, Captain Bold?” she asked.

“Well,” his face was very red, but he looked straight at her, “as long as you don't know the one who wrote the letter I'd like to ask you if you don't think it would seem a little as if I were—were contemplating assuming a position that I'm not? Do I make myself clear?”

“I think if you wrote such a letter as has been suggested to you, and wrote it in good faith,” said Mrs. Tippet slowly, “your Cousin Marilla might have reason to feel that her position in your household was very precarious.”

“There!” and the captain's voice was full of gratitude. “You've put it just right. Exactly right. And I can't have Marilla made uneasy after all the years she's taken care of me.

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'Tisn't fair. Now the question arises, what shall I do about it?"

"Oh, that is a point you will have to settle for yourself," said Mrs. Tippet. "No doubt you will think of just the right thing to do. You will of course have to answer the letter."

"I suppose I shall," said the captain dubiously. "I've known her all her married life. She isn't Pelling born, but her husband was a good friend of mine. He's been dead six years and she's missed him, I know, though she didn't make him so very comfortable while he lived. The boy's missed him, too."

There seemed to be nothing for Mrs. Tippet to say, although the captain paused and looked at her.

"I'll tell you what I might do," he offered the suggestion doubtfully after a moment's silence. "I might write to Cousin Marilla, enclosing the letter and ask her to say to the other one—they're old friends—ask her to say to her that much as I appreciate the honor and—and esteem that's been shown me I don't feel competent to give the boy the guiding hand he

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needs. And say to Marilla that as I know women have a more delicate manner of adjusting things than men, I'll leave it in her hands to explain my feelings to the other one. Is that clear to you?"

"It is exceedingly clear," said Mrs. Tippet. "Do you think your Cousin Marilla would be willing to undertake that commission for you?"

They had reached the steps of the house on Walnut Street, incredible as it seemed to the captain. He stopped deliberately and being under the umbrella Mrs. Tippet also stopped, perforce.

"I think she'd be more than willing," said the captain. "I think she'd be overjoyed. She's been saying for—well, for some time—that she thought Mrs.—the other one, ought to go to live with her brother, who is an old bachelor and alone in the world. He's offered to take her and the boy again and again. He lives twenty miles from Pelling."

"Then," said Mrs. Rose Tippet with a smile which made the captain oblivious to everything else, "entirely on your Cousin Marilla's account,

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it seems to me your plan might be a good one. Miss Rawson has opened the door for us, and I think she is wondering why we stand here."

"Let her wonder," said the captain under his breath, "and I shan't hand over this bundle till she's out of the way, not if I have to wait till she's gone to bed."

"Have you two been shopping?" asked Miss Rawson, her eyes on the captain's package.

"Shopping? No, ma'am," and her intended victim started up-stairs, the "beautiful roast" still under his arm. "I had a little matter of business to attend to, and by the way, as you might say, I got something that should have been sent here long ago. I thank you very much, Mrs. Tippet, for helping me out as you have, and I hope some day I can do as much for you."

"Did he have to go out in all this rain to attend to business?" asked Miss Rawson sharply.

"He seemed to think he must," said Mrs. Tippet, "and you know there is very little use in arguing with a man over the weather."

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“There’s no use arguing with them over anything,” snapped Miss Rawson, “for the reason that they don’t know how to argue. The bottom of your skirt is soaking at the back. Why didn’t you lift it? I notice you had no umbrella to carry.”





CHAPTER XIII

"I'D like to know the name of that piece," said the captain, "and then I'd admire to hear it again—if not to-night, some other time."

"Did it make you think of anything in particular?" asked Ruth Temple, leaning her elbows on the piano and looking over the music-rack at the captain, sunk in the depths of the sleepy-hollow chair in her little sitting-room. "I'd like to know that first, please."

"Just as soon tell you as not," said the captain. "It made me think of a common thing,

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because that's the only kind of thing I'm used to. I haven't much imagination, I guess."

He looked at her humbly, bespeaking her leniency, but she only smiled back at him, waiting.

"Sometimes of a hot summer afternoon I lose myself, out on the south porch," said the captain slowly, "take a kind of a cat-nap; and while I'm half asleep and half awake I'll hear a 'tap, tap, tap—tap, tap'—like that on the tin roof over my head. First it's sort of soothing, and then it begins to drum a little, and I hear a mutter of thunder, and all of a sudden I wake up and hear Marilla scurrying over the house shutting windows, and I have to draw in close to the wall. Then it'll boom and pelt for a few minutes and then the clouds roll off to the north; you understand we're just getting the edge of the shower, not the full heft of it, and then the rain stops after a while, and the sun comes out, and all I hear is a little bit of a 'tap, tap—tap,' coming from the leaves of the Dutchman's Pipe where it runs over the porch. That's what your piece made me think about."

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"Oh, you are a joy!" cried Ruth Temple. "You couldn't have heard it better. It's a prelude by Chopin, and it has always been known as 'The Rain on the Roof.' Listen again, please, while I play you another."

"Tumbling all over itself, hurrying to get through the meadow and run into the river," laughed the captain when she had finished. "Doesn't seem as if that could be meant for anything but a brook."

"Exactly right," said the girl. "I knew it the very first time I saw you. I said to myself, '*Here's* somebody I can play to, who will understand!' It makes such a difference to me—when people don't!"

The captain looked at her through the twilight of the room.

"Oho!" he said to himself. "So that's the way the wind is setting," and aloud, "Seems pretty important to you, I guess."

"It does," said the girl earnestly. "You see music means so much to me, more and more as I grow older and hear it and study it. In school it's the children who have musical tastes

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to whom I'm drawn most closely, and with whom I can work best. The lack of musical appreciation—not education, of course that's quite different—it's like a real barrier. Don't you think when we're very young we like people without discrimination and as we grow older we just *have* to change our point of view, no matter how hard it is ?”

“M-m,” said the captain. “There's a good deal in that idea—a—good—deal, but I should say it could be carried too far. Now appreciation strikes me as being desirable and pleasant, like Marilla's spiced currant ; you get a kind of a different taste with your chicken when you take that spiced currant sauce along with it ; but I've eaten in places right in our town where 'twas seven different kinds of cake and these little gape-and-swallow tea-rolls and spiced currant, and I've come away wishing never to taste it again. You want to make pretty sure of your chicken.”

The girl eyed him thoughtfully for a moment, then she laughed.

“I will consider that point, oh, sage,” she

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said, nodding at him. "Now listen again. I'll tell you the name of this—it's 'Starlight.'"

The captain listened, frowning, and when she stopped playing, he shook his head.

"No, sir," he spoke with authority, "not my kind of starlight, that isn't. Excepting, well, I don't know—might be one of those nights with scudding clouds and some mist, so you'd see the stars and then lose 'em and—but 't isn't my idea of a starlit night. How would it be if you should play me 'Annie Laurie' before I go floundering in way out of my depth? A straight tune with words gives you something to tie to and know where you are."

"That's what Mr. Severance says;" the girl's laugh had a light edge of scorn.

"Mighty sensible fellow he is," said the captain firmly. "You let your mind dwell on that a little. It's the things we let our minds dwell on that get to seem the most important to us; trouble generally is we don't let 'em dwell where they ought to. 'Twouldn't do for me to preach, for there are cases right in this house where I know my mind's dwelling all wrong;

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it's fixed on what appear to be faults instead of—— Come, let's have 'Annie Laurie'; that's considerably safer than what I was pretty near saying."

After "Annie Laurie" came "Old Black Joe" and "Music in the Air." The captain sat, a smile of deep satisfaction on his face, softly beating time with his right hand. At last there came a little pause, and the girl turned to look at a pile of music.

"Could you give me the Wedding March?" asked the captain. "I'd kind of like to hear it."

She forbore to tell him that there were a number of wedding marches, for she knew by instinct the one he meant; smiling, she sounded the triplet call and a moment later the chords of Mendelssohn's famous march pealed out into the hall. The captain sat up and forgot to beat time, and out on the stairs Jack Severance on his way up to his room stood listening. Once he started to go down and knock, but on second thought he shook his head. It was just then that the door of Miss Rawson's room, which had been ajar, creaked.

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Setting his jaw the young man mounted the remaining stairs and tramped by the door through the crack of which he knew a pair of sharp eyes had been peering at him. As he passed the crack widened and Miss Rawson spoke.

"It's hard to be shut out of Paradise when others are admitted, isn't it?" she asked sympathetically. "Is it raining now?"

"I don't know," said Jack Severance, who a few moments before had set his dripping umbrella in the hall stand. "Good-night," and he closed his door.

Left in possession of the hall, Miss Rawson stood for a moment, her nostrils dilating. Then she descended a few stairs and put her face close to the gas jet which hung from the balustrade.

"The gas is escaping, I think," she murmured, "and as it must be about time I'll turn it out. Don't I smell cigar smoke? I certainly do. That Farnham man has left the door of the den open, no doubt, and here it is almost ten o'clock. I shall speak to Mrs. Tip-

CAP'N GID

pett in the morning. She will have to adopt firm measures. I presume she's in her bed, sound asleep, without a care on her mind. I wonder if those maids are both in their rooms; probably they're out gallivanting. I'll just take a look, and ——"

Softly she crept up the stairs and along the hall to a door which led to the maids' quarters. Softly she turned the knob and opened the door. The sound of voices, low but steady, reached her listening ears. She advanced toward the little room from which the sound came, her eyes in the darkness gleaming like a cat's.

"Maggie is in Amanda's room," she told herself, "in spite of all Mrs. Hitchings has said about the necessity of their going to bed promptly at nine o'clock to be ready for the next morning. I shall speak of this; say the sound of voices disturbed me. I—— Why, that isn't Maggie's voice!"

Quite close to the door she stood now. A streak of light showed under it, and from within she heard the sound of a voice she knew.

CAP'N GID

"I don't know how to thank you, Amanda," came clearly to her ears. "I had forgotten that this was his day to come, and if it hadn't been for your help he would have stayed until some one saw him. Oh, if they had ! probably I should lose all my boarders, Amanda, if they knew about him. It is such a—such a disgrace !"

"It is not so," rumbled Amanda's deep voice. "It is not your debts, and you need not to pay except for you are so honest. That is the way with women, the worse they are treated the more softer their hearts get."

"My heart is not soft ;" the listener thought she caught the sound of tears in the voice and her thin lips straightened. "My heart is turning to stone, Amanda, with care and worry and fear."

"You stop it," said Amanda. "You stop it right away now, and go to your bed. It is over now for another two weeks."

Noiselessly the listener crept away, closing the hall door behind her and scurried into her room. From below came the sound of the

CAP'N GID

captain's voice, bidding his entertainer good-night, and telling her how much he had enjoyed the evening, but Miss Rawson had other matters of greater moment to occupy her mind. She closed her door and stood in the centre of her room.

"She's deceived me—she's deceived us all!" she breathed. "That husband of hers is alive, and she's letting that poor deluded man from the country think of her as a widow. I see there is some work for me to do in this house—and I shall do it."





CHAPTER XIV

IT seemed to Captain Bold on the morning after his happy time with Ruth Temple and her music as if there were something strange and electrical in the air of the dining-room. The eyes of Miss Rawson, who had been the first one at the breakfast table, gave forth sudden gleams as she turned from one to another of the household.

Toward the captain himself she adopted a protecting, pitying air which made him vaguely uncomfortable, and her remarks to him, which were more frequent than usual, seemed all to

CAP'N GID

contain some inner, hidden meaning for which he searched in vain.

"Are you feeling well, captain?" she asked solicitously as he pushed back his chair. "You haven't eaten much breakfast, I notice, and this is the time of year when one needs nourishment, especially; these warm spring days are so trying, they take the strength; and then when we're called upon to bear any extra strain, we give way under it."

"I'm not looking for any extra strain just at present, ma'am," said the captain briskly, but he felt both irritated and perplexed by the expression of her upturned face, and the shake of her head.

"What's the matter with her?" he demanded of Mr. Corcoran who joined him in the hall and linked his arm in the captain's, saying: "Whither away this blithe and bonny morn, my hearty?"

"Matter with her? I don't know, but she looks ready to burst with importance and knowledge," said the broker. "She's got hold of some back-stair secret, probably, and she's

CAP'N GID

waiting for a good chance to spring it on us. Probably something about Mrs. Tippet."

"Well, I won't listen to her, no matter where she waylays me," said the captain.

"Good work," said the broker. "If I were a marrying man I'd take that sweet little woman out of all this business. Hasn't been able to let that small room up-stairs, for Grenadier Hitchings won't allow her to lower the price. I've half a mind to turn Benedict, I vow I have."

The captain digested the statement in silence. As they turned toward the corner Mr. Corcoran eyed him shrewdly.

"Doesn't just please you," he said. "Maybe you think she wouldn't take me, but she might do worse."

"Of course she might," agreed the captain hastily. "But you say you aren't a marrying man, and perhaps she isn't a marrying woman now. She's had one husband."

"So she has, and regarded in the light of a sample, I should think he would have inspired distrust in the lot of us," said Mr. Corcoran. "She'd fight shy of another, probably."

CAP'N GID

"See here, you talk as if men were all cut by the same pattern," said the captain indignantly. "There are plenty of decent men, same as there are plenty of sweet women in the world," he added.

"Right-o," said the broker. "Why didn't you pick one out years ago, or why don't you pick one out now, for that matter? Here you are hale and hearty, good-tempered so far as I know—the very man to assume domestic ties."

"I have one domestic tie now," said the captain grimly, "my Cousin Marilla, and I had a letter from her yesterday asking me when I intended to come home, so she could put away the thick suit I wore down here. I've given away that suit since I came here—but I shall have to account to her for it. Marilla's home is with me and has been for twenty years. I don't know what she'd do, what she'd have done, if I'd been a marrying man."

"Why don't you marry her, then?" asked Mr. Corcoran, with a glance from the corner of his eye which the captain missed.

"Marry Marilla? Marry Ma —— Well, you

CAP'N GID

haven't ever seen her," spluttered the captain. "Why, she—she'd broom me out o' the house if I suggested such a thing! Marilla isn't—— Well, I can't describe her to you," he ended weakly. "You'll have to see her some day, then you'll understand what I mean."

"Why don't you have her down here for a visit, give her a change and take her mind off your winter clothes?" suggested the broker. "That's just one of my bright little ideas. Think it over. We say good-bye here. Good luck to you. That young dentist of yours must be a wizard—gets you there twice in one week! He'll have you too beautiful if you don't look out."

The captain, left to himself, walked rather slowly, his hands clasped behind his back, gazing idly in at the shop windows. There was plenty of time to spare before his appointment with Dr. Warner. Peggy Townsend was away for a few days, so there would be no chance of meeting her if he went to Miss Letty's little shop. He did not feel just like going to the Library.

"No, it's the kind of day to stay outdoors as

CAP'N GID

· much as you can," thought the captain. "I'm almost sorry I'm going to sit in the dentist's chair even for half an hour. Hullo, what does this mean, young lady? Been sent home from school?"

For around the corner came Ruth Temple with pink cheeks, and a general holiday air.

"There's something the matter with the steam in our schoolroom," she informed him gaily; "they can't turn it off, so they've sent for the man to fix it, and as he can't get there for two hours, we've been given the whole day—think of that! I feel so rich in time that I haven't yet made up my mind how to spend it. Could you suggest anything, Captain Bold?"

"I could if 'twasn't for being promised to that cousin of yours for half an hour pretty soon," vouchsafed the captain. "I'd suggest that we get a luncheon put up at the Exchange, and make tracks for the wharf to catch the eleven o'clock boat up the river. I've been thinking of that trip, but it seemed kind of lonesome to take it alone, and there wasn't anybody to take it with me. Folks are all so busy."

CAP'N GID

"It's the very thing!" cried the girl. "Come, I'll make it all right with Rob—the idea of expecting anybody to sit in a dentist's chair on a morning like this. I'll attend to him!"

"Robert," she said five minutes later, looking at her cousin with mock indignation, "what sort of heart is lurking in your breast that you would keep anybody in town on a day like this, just for a little work that could as well be done in a pouring rain? I'm astonished at you! Captain Bold and I are going off at eleven o'clock, up river, and we have no time to lose. He can come to you just as well to-morrow, can't he?"

"No, he can't, miss, I'm proud to tell you," said her cousin, fluttering the pages of his appointment book and displaying one on which there were no empty spaces. "I would have you understand that I am on the highroad to fame, fortune and matrimony. My luck has changed. He can't come for three days—three whole days, miss! But I'll gladly let him off this morning."

"Dear me!" jeered the girl. "I'd better be having Jean's monogram designed in a hurry."

CAP'N GID

Shall I have time to work it on one table-cloth, do you think ? ”

“ It depends on your skill,” said the young man. “ And now avaunt ! with your prey, if you please. I must return to my patient. Good-bye, captain. I hope you’ll have a fine time, and don’t let this impertinent young cousin of mine eat too much. She used to, as a child.”

“ We shall take a frugal luncheon,” the girl tossed back at him over her shoulder, “ but there will be nutcakes—*now* don’t you wish you were going ? ”

With a hollow groan the young man closed the door on his visitors who in another moment were hurrying along the street toward the Woman’s Exchange. Just before they reached it they met Mrs. Hitchings, flanked by Mrs. Damon and Miss Rawson, all three carrying bags from the gaping tops of which protruded pamphlets of a sanguinary hue. This formidable trio paused, and it was evident that Mrs. Hitchings, transfixed with amazement, was about to address an inquiry to Miss Temple.

CAP'N GID

The captain, however, placed a guiding hand beneath the right elbow of his companion and bore her swiftly past the group.

"We're perfectly safe in here," said the girl as they fled up the steps and into the sales-room; "the president of the Exchange is anti-suffrage, and not one of those devoted ladies would set foot over this threshold for a hundred dollars."

"Good enough," returned the captain. "Now let's see what looks best to us, and get it. How does that little chicken strike you? Seems to me a likely bird."

"I should say it was," agreed Miss Temple, "but don't you think sandwiches would be easier to carry and to eat? I wasn't planning for knives and forks, were you?"

"Of course not," and the captain looked quite crestfallen for a moment; then his spirits rose again. "Anyway, we can have some of those little pies," he said firmly. "I speak for those; they won't need cutting, for there are only a couple of mouthfuls in one of them."

"We'll have some, certainly," laughed the

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girl, and after that there was no checking the captain, who secured the attention of a competent young person with a salesbook and pencil and kept her busy selecting dainties until her tray was piled with them.

"Air from over the water always makes folks hungry," said the captain as they watched the packing of a large pasteboard box. "Looks to me as if we might have a real tasty luncheon, and this is my treat," he added as he saw a small pocketbook in Ruth Temple's hands. "I've been wondering what I could give you that would show my thanks for the treats you've given me, but I couldn't think of a thing. Now when you eat one of those apple turnovers maybe you'll say to yourself, 'Not much like "Rain on the Roof" but it's intended all right,' and when you bite into one of those frosted cakes you'll think, 'No "Starlight" about this, but he's done the best he could.' And the sandwiches can stand for 'Annie Laurie' and the other old favorites."

"Oh, Captain Bold, you're over-thanking me, that's the only trouble," said Ruth Temple.

CAP'N GID

"There's enough luncheon in that box for three or four people. We can't possibly eat it all. You know the river air isn't salt; we shan't be quite so hungry as if we were on the ocean, I'm afraid."

"I'm sharp-set already thinking about it," announced the captain. "And who knows but we may meet somebody who hasn't had time or forethought to provide any food."

"We're not likely to meet any one we know," said the girl doubtfully.

"Oh, we'll know them before we get through," and the captain smiled down at her as he received the big box from the young saleswoman. "There's nothing like hunger to bring folks together. You'll see."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then laughed.

"All right," she said. "I'll wait to see."

She looked at him again when, all preliminaries having been accomplished, they sat side by side on the upper deck of the river-steamer, their two chairs drawn close to the railing. The captain was surveying with the

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frank delight of a child the stream of passengers coming down the gangplank, and he did not see her glance.

"Mrs. Hitchings calls him 'that common man,'" mused Ruth Temple as she watched him, "but I think she's mistaken. He isn't like anybody else; and that's very different from being 'common.' But I do hope he won't invite the first hungry-looking person he sees to share our luncheon."

The captain was humming to himself. He turned to the girl beside him with the air of one sure of sympathy.

"I never get tired of seeing folks I don't know and making up stories about them," he said, with his right thumb pointing backward to the gangway. "See that little woman with the gay bonnet on, talking to the tall man? I'll wager she never had a bonnet like that before; you can tell from the way she holds her head. Just married, and not so young as she'd have been fifteen years ago; but he wants her to look young as she can. Don't you think I've guessed them about right?"

CAP'N GID

"I believe you have," laughed the girl. "The tall man hasn't had that air of proprietorship very long, I'm sure. Do you suppose they were old lovers, and their marriage was delayed?"

The captain gazed after the retreating couple, his lips pursed.

"N-no," he said at last. "I think they've both had hard times, maybe, and only got round to thinking of—— Say, look who's coming now!"

It was Jack Severance, his face upturned, wearing an expression of mixed bewilderment and pleasure. As he caught the eye of Captain Bold he took off his hat and waved it. A moment more and he was seated beside Ruth Temple and explaining his presence.

"I'm sent up river to see the bungalow that Aldrich has just had built," he said, and in spite of herself the girl's smile answered his. "Jolly luck for me, this is. You don't mean to tell me you have a lunch box! I didn't have time to get a snack; barely caught the boat."

"It's all for the best, young man," and the

CAP'N GID

captain beamed on him, "for we are provisioned beyond our needs. We'll have a nice little family party, that's what we'll have."

"I came near knocking down our suffragette trio as I was leaping along, thinking I'd lost the boat," said Jack Severance when they were fairly off. "They had a grim appearance, taken in the mass; I wonder what's happened to them."

"We shall know to-night," said Ruth Temple demurely, "that is if they're not too much engaged in finding out where we've been, for Captain Bold and I met them, too."

"That for the busy three!" and Jack Severance snapped his fingers. "Let's forget that the worst is yet to come and revel in the present. And now might I inquire whether this picnic is impromptu or long-planned? for if it's the latter you may look to see my lower lip tremble. I'm a trusting soul and I've been thinking I was a treasured friend to you both."

"You silly!" laughed Ruth Temple. "What you need is a sandwich right away. I wish Mrs. Tippet were here. She'd just love all this."

CAP'N GID

"So she would," said the captain beaming, "so she would."

He forgot his half-eaten sandwich as he looked up the river, smiling at his thoughts, until his fingers relaxed their hold and there came a little splash in the water. The captain hastily removed his elbow from the rail, and at that moment his Cousin Marilla came into his mind.

"That is, seems as if she would ; seems as if anybody would," said the captain. "Of course I don't know her so well as either of you."

"No?" said Jack Severance. "I'd like another sandwich, please, Miss Temple, and I think the captain needs one, too."

"Mine's gone, that's a fact," admitted the captain. "I was thinking what a nice party we could make up if I had my old boat, and we could go anywhere we liked, choose our course. Might even go to China if we were so disposed."

"Why not consider it?" Jack Severance folded his arms behind his head and leaned back, his eyes half closed. "Mrs. Tippet and Miss Temple, with that admirable cousin of

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yours for chaperon, you and I, bound for China. It seems a perfectly good idea to me. Why not carry it out, captain ?”

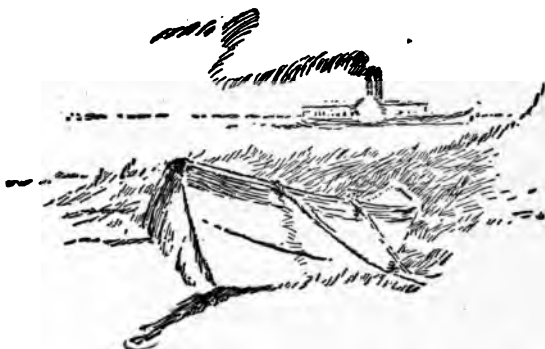
“ Oh, I’ve been a landsman twenty years now,” said the captain, but his eyes held the look that never wholly leaves the eyes of a lover and follower of the sea. “ Once a year I take a day’s voyage with an old friend of mine, and he lets me get my hand on things, but that’s all. And as for Marilla, she’ll never be persuaded to put foot on board a craft of any sort.”

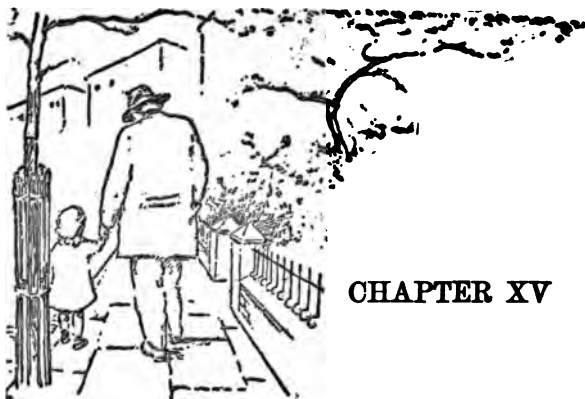
“ That’s sad,” but a light flickered under the young man’s lowered eyelids. “ Well, of course there are conditions under which we could dispense with the chaperon. If either you or I were ——”

“ Will you hand Captain Bold the nutcakes ?” said Ruth Temple in a tone so sweetly remote that the flicker died and the eyes of Jack Severance opened wide. “ As we came for a river trip why not enjoy it instead of wasting time on dreams which could never by any possibility come true ?”

CAP'N GID

“You are so practical, so sternly practical with me that you come very near being harsh,” said Jack Severance plaintively. “And with the captain, too, the provider of this bountiful repast, if I understood correctly. Captain Bold, may I tender you a nutcake? As for me, I doubt if I can swallow for a few moments.”





CHAPTER XV

THE captain had an appointment to meet Peggy Townsend and her mother at Miss Letty's shop, receive Peggy from her parent's hands and take her for a joyous hour in the park while Mrs. Townsend did something in which Peggy had no interest.

"It is very kind of you to give so much of your time to my small daughter," said Mrs. Townsend graciously. "I don't know what Peggy will do when you go away. She told her grandmother three times during our visit that you were 'the very nicest gentleman she knew.' You seem to know just how to get on

CAP'N GID

with children, although Peggy tells me you have none of your own."

"No, ma'am, I've never married," said the captain soberly. "It never seemed to come just right for me to do it, and I've never seen the one that would make me feel I must ride over obstacles and twist circumstances till I got her. And I'm blessed with an excellent house-keeper, my Cousin Marilla. Perhaps Peggy's told you about her; I've spoken of her a number of times. She's dependent on me for a home, and I owe it to her for all the years she's looked after me."

"Yes, I understand, of course," said Mrs. Townsend vaguely, her mind already on what she was planning to do. "Peggy, you must not stand looking at those toys another minute, keeping your kind friend waiting. I will return here in about an hour, Captain Bold, and thank you so much."

"Do you love your Couthin Marilla very, *very* much?" asked Peggy, skipping along beside the captain a moment later.

"Why, I don't know as Marilla and I've ever

CAP'N GID

thought much about loving," said the captain slowly; "we like each other first rate; we think differently about 'most everything, and I'm a real trial to her some ways, and she's a bit trying to me now and then, but we—why, yes, Peggy, I guess we love each other the usual amount full."

Peggy eyed him with an elfin smile on her face.

"Thome of my couthins I love and thome of them I don't like one bit," she said. "I think Mithes Tippet is pretty, don't you? She came into Mith Letty's while I was there yethterday. If she were your couthin, wouldn't you love her?"

The captain's face burned. Peggy looked up at him with great interest, and waited.

"I presume I should do whatever was natural," said the captain at last.

"She'd be a lovely couthin," Peggy stated with conviction, "but she'th pretty young to be your couthin, ithn't she? Wouldn't she have to be a niece?"

"Maybe she would," said the captain, with

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an unpleasant little twinge at the thought. "But I'm not so sure about *that*, either," he added cheerfully; "some people look a great deal older than they are; you don't know but I'm one of that kind, missy; and some look a great deal younger than they are, and Mrs. Tippet may be one of *that* kind, for all you know."

"*Maybe*," said Peggy doubtfully, "but she thmiled at me and she looked ever and *ever* so young to be your couthin, truly. But you're not a bit old," she hastened to add, seeing that her friend had a look of disappointment; "I think you're jutht exactly the right age."

"That's a comfort," said the captain. "If somebody says that to you when you're half a century old and two years over you'll be as pleased as I am. Here we are at the park entrance, and here's a friend of mine, true as I live. Going to write up the spring flowers for your paper?"

"I haven't looked at them," said Jack Severance who, to the captain's mind, wore a downcast air. "I took the short cut through the park from a house over on the other side where

CAP'N GID

I'd been sent to get information—and mighty little I was able to get. The chief won't hand me out any compliments for to-day's work, I know that well enough. This is a mean old world to-day, anyhow."

"M'm," said the captain, "I've noticed you seemed to be feeling that way about it lately. There's been too much going on in the musical world to suit you, I judge. But Miss Temple and that slim young man from Boston seem to have been enjoying it pretty well."

"I don't see any reason for quarreling with their enjoyment," said Jack Severance, stiffly; "although how a fellow with a chin like that can get any pleasure out of life is beyond me! Miss Temple has known him a long time; he's the brother of a college friend of hers."

"But that doesn't help his chin any," said the captain. "It is a real drawback in more senses than one, but I reckon Miss Temple has grown used to it. She tells me he's crammed full of music, and I presume she takes his chin for granted, same as we do little failings in those we're fond of, always."

CAP'N GID

"I don't believe she's fond of him," said Jack Severance hotly; "she couldn't be! But they're congenial when it comes to music; and she's being nice to him as long as he's only here for a fortnight and she likes his sister. What have you seen to make you think she's fond of him?"

At this point Peggy, who had been assuming interest in a toad she had discovered in the grass, felt that she had effaced herself long enough, and broke into the conversation.

"You didn't thpeak to me at all," she said severely to the young man who had looked over her head at the captain when their meeting took place. "Are you croth this beautiful morning?"

"Why, hello, Peggy, you must pardon my negligence," said Jack Severance. "I really didn't see you."

"Look here," and the captain's eyes lighted with mischief, "you take Peggy down to the brook, and I'll sit here on this bench till you come back. My foot has troubled me a little bit the last day or two and that stony path would be kind of hard on it."

CAP'N GID

"All right, come on, Peggy," said the young man ; he was none too cordial, but Peggy was not exacting with her friends and she seized his hand with right good will, pulling him joyfully toward the goal of her desires.

"There !" said the captain. "I guess Marilla would say I managed that fairly well ; and it's the first good chance I've had to carry out her suggestions. Now let's see how they work. That young fellow from Boston's going home to-morrow ; about to-morrow night will be my opportunity ; Friday, that's my lucky day, too."

The young man from Boston had occupied the small room at 385 Walnut Street for only two weeks and had taken few meals with the other boarders, so that he was not missed by any one, with the presumable exception of Miss Temple. She, however, seemed in the best of spirits the next night at dinner.

"Would you like to hear some music to-night ?" she asked the captain. "It's a good while since you've been in my sitting-room, and I feel just in the mood for playing."

CAP'N GID

"I'll be delighted," said the captain. "Pity Mr. Severance isn't here, so you could invite him, too ; but he seems to be away."

"He's probably off on some assignment that will oblige him to take his dinner in one of those queer Bohemian places he always talks about," said the girl carelessly ; "and anyway he doesn't care for music as you do."

"Maybe not," said the captain, "but he cares a good deal for your playing."

"Oh," Ruth Temple moved her head impatiently, "my playing ! What sort of things does he like me to play, best of all ? They are not music, really."

"No," said the captain tolerantly, "I suppose they aren't, judged by a high standard, but they're real pleasant to listen to. I wonder where he is to-night. I saw him walking with about as pretty a little girl as I ever laid my eyes on yesterday."

Ruth Temple turned a look of frank astonishment on the captain.

"Jack Severance walking with a girl !" she said, and the captain noted with joy that the

CAP'N GID

adjective he had put in as a concession to truth had passed unnoticed. "Why, he's always telling me he has nothing to do with girls."

"He was having something to do with this particular one," and the captain gave a well planned chuckle. "'Twas in the park I saw them. I guess you don't know much about what's been going on for the past two weeks, outside of music, do you?"

"No," said the girl thoughtfully. "No, I don't. But I shouldn't have supposed, however ——"

She did not finish her sentence although the captain waited with apparent anxiety. That evening two spots of bright red grew in her cheeks as she played. She chose for the most part light, tricky things which tickled the captain's fancy. At the end of one he laughed outright.

"Sounds like little creatures chasing each other," he said delightedly. "Couldn't we have that over again?"

"It is called 'Puck'—you remember him in 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' This is by

CAP'N GID

Grieg; you've liked ever so many of his things, you know."

The captain nodded.

"I always remember him and what you told me about him; it seems wonderful to me that a man living way off there could make up music that tells its stories so plainly to me," he said. "You'd think 'twould be a language I couldn't understand. I had an awful piece of work with a Norwegian sailor once; seemed to me we'd both go out of our minds before we got to an interpreter. But music's different; I reckon it's kind of universal."

"That's just it," said the girl quickly, "for those who have souls to understand it and ears to hear it, it *is* a universal language, and for the others—it's just a jargon, I suppose," she added.

"Aren't you sorry for them, those others?" asked the captain. "Just think what they lose! And with a little help, maybe some of them would learn to understand it. Now there's ——"

"You needn't say what you were going to,

CAP'N GID

Captain Bold," broke in Ruth Temple, and although she laughed the two red spots in her cheeks burned brighter than ever. "They don't need our sorrow, or want it, those others. They'd rather—they'd rather spend their time walking with pretty girls. Now you and I will have 'Puck' again."

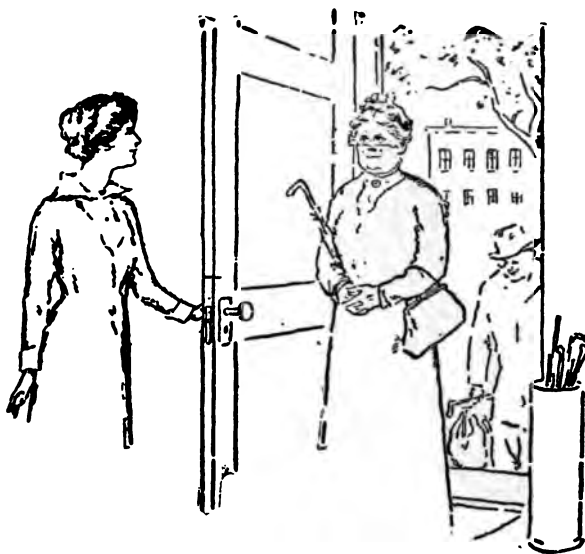
The captain listened, but this time it was with a divided mind. For while Puck's antics delighted him as before, over and over, back and forth in his brain chased thoughts of Jack Severance.

"Better even than the first time," he said when Puck had given his last airy kick and danced out of hearing, but to himself he was saying, "Marilla was right! She certainly was right, however she knew. If Jack Severance were to walk in here this minute and I cleared out I believe 'twould be all settled inside of a half hour. And it's just the mention of another girl that's done it! Did you ever see a plan work so fast? Why, she fired right up, and was livelier at supper than she's been for days. I do feel a bit deceitful, though,

CAP'N GID

calling Peggy 'a pretty little girl.' But it certainly was the very thing. I—well—I'll invite Marilla down, as Mr. Corcoran suggested. I declare I will."





CHAPTER XVI

“WELL, sir, I took your advice and sent for her,” said Captain Bold, who had hurried out of the door after Mr. Corcoran, and now fell in step with him. “Yes, sir, ’twas all transacted while you were out of town. She’s coming to-day. I’m on my way to the station to meet her.”

The broker stared at him. “Who in —— What are you talking about?” he inquired.

CAP'N GID

"I suppose your mind's so full of the stock market you've forgotten all about her," said the captain. "I'm referring to Cousin Marilla Bold, who keeps house for me up in Pelling. 'Twas you that suggested my asking her, and she jumped at the chance. Coming to-day, as I said before. Going to have the small room on the third floor."

"Oho, I remember now," and the little eyes shot a glance at the captain. "She's the obstacle to your matrimonial plans."

"What put that into your head?" The captain shouted so that two passers-by stopped and looked toward a policeman stationed across the street. "I've got no matrimonial plans!"

"So I understood," and his companion looked down at him with baffling calm. "I judged you couldn't really have any while Cousin Marilla, so to speak, blocked the passage. Good luck to you, captain. I've got to see a man in here."

"Now what in thunder did he mean by talking about my matrimonial plans!" fumed the man left on the corner. "As if I hadn't

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more'n enough on my shoulders already. If he should say a word to Marilla and she flew off at a tangent as she did that time somebody started talk about the Widow Mason, where would I be? I reckon I'd better speak a word with him before he sees Marilla. A man that makes up something out of less'n nothing is kind of dangerous. Hello, little girl, I came near not seeing you."

"I was watching you," said Peggy Townsend, her eyes dancing as she slipped her hand into the captain's. "Your face is jutht as *red*! and I thought maybe you were mad, but then I saw how pleathed you looked, and I knew you were almotht laughing."

"Laughing!" echoed the captain. "Not at all, my dear. I was far from laughing. I was thinking of a very serious matter. A very serious matter indeed. You give my regards to Miss Letty and tell her I shall be in soon to see her and bring a cousin of mine who's coming to-day to make me a visit."

"I'll tell her," said Peggy as they reached Miss Letty's door, "and I'll tell her how

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pleathed you looked when I met you. Good-bye."

"By George, there must be something wrong with my face," muttered the captain as he trudged on. "I'd better go to one o' these elocution teachers and learn how to express my different emotions. Let's see what Marilla'll say when she sights me. I'll wager there won't anything escape her."

They were seated in the cab with Miss Marilla's suit-case, from which she had refused to part, bumping between them, before the captain received a full inspection.

"What you been doing to yourself?" then demanded his cousin. "You're all spruced up. Your hair's cut different; and that suit's new. Did you forget you had a perfectly good one up home? If I hadn't supposed you'd be going back when I do, I'd have brought it down. What are you smiling about, Cousin Gid? You look sort o' foolish."

"I'm not smiling," said the captain stoutly. "I don't know what's the matter with folks this morning. 'Tisn't the first nor the second

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time that remarks have been passed on my looks."

"No wonder," said Miss Marilla. "Are there any widows in that place you're staying? or are all those women widows? As I said to our minister's wife, what with abbreviations and handwriting that's almost impossible to read at its best, the news I've got out of your letters is sparse and muddled. You tell off the names to me before we get to the house."

"Mrs. Hitchings, she's tall and commanding and into all suffrage works," began the captain, checking off the names on his fingers. "She's a widow. Mrs. Damon, short and heavy built, with a good deal of jewelry and trimming, a teary make-up, large appetite, husband out West; also suffrage. Miss Rawson, thin and peaked, wants to know a little more than is going on, also suffrage. Miss Temple, young and pretty, teaches school; anti-suffrage. Jack Severance, in love with her and doesn't much care who knows it; her mind's wavering because he isn't up to her standard of musical and otherwise culture, but her heart's set on him,

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to my thinking. Mr. Corcoran, a stock broker, and a joker. Sometimes sees jokes where there aren't any. Mr. Farnham, plenty of money and no stomach according to his own statements. Oh—and Mrs. Rose Tippet, our landlady.”

“Oh ——” Miss Marilla’s exclamation was an exact imitation of the captain’s. “I’m glad you thought to speak of her, but I suppose you don’t see her as often as the others. Meal-times, for instance, I presume she stays in the kitchen and attends to things.”

“No, oh, no,” said the captain. “She’s generally there at the table. Oh, yes, she’s always there for dinners—and breakfasts often.”

“Funny you came near forgetting her,” said Miss Marilla. “Where’s her husband?”

“He is dead, I understand,” and the captain repeated his statement with more assurance. “Yes, I guess there’s no doubt he’s dead.”

“Well, I must say!” Miss Marilla condescended to no light tricks of picking imaginary threads or flecking dust from her garments, such as a more merciful woman might have

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employed ; she kept a steady gaze fixed on the captain's reddening face and beneath that gaze he quailed. "Don't you know for certain whether or not Mrs. Rose Tippet is a widow?"

"I feel perfectly sure of it ; just as sure as that I'm sitting here with you," said the captain, taking off his hat and wiping his brow. "But given a woman in her position, there'll always be folks to question and surmise and ——"

"Where is he buried?" broke in Miss Marilla coldly.

"Good land! I don't know where he's buried!" said the captain irritably. "Don't you suppose I've had other things to do beside asking her where her husband's buried? What would she have thought of me?"

"I don't know what she thinks of you now," said Miss Marilla. "But I'm proposing to find out. I've found out pretty near what you think of her, already."

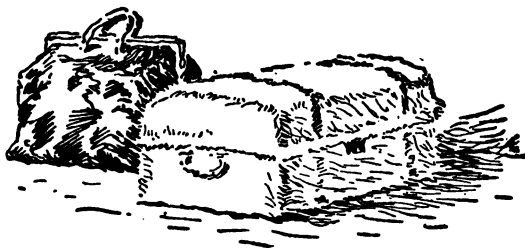
"You have not!" cried the captain desperately. "I mean—I don't think anything of her, not in that way, Marilla! Consider my age! Fifty-two."

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"You don't look it, not fixed up as you are to-day," said Miss Marilla quite unmoved. "And what 'way' is it that you don't think anything of her?"

"I've been here only eight weeks." The captain was half conscious of irrelevance, but his dignity clutched at any straw. "There, this is our street. And here's the house. You let me get out first."

"Don't you suppose I know the rudiments of behavior?" said Miss Marilla. "You're acting like a three-year-old, Cousin Gid, and if you think I don't know how glad you are we've got here, you're mightily mistaken. Who's that looking out the third-story window?"





CHAPTER XVII

IT was the third day after Miss Marilla's arrival, and already it seemed to Captain Gideon Bold as if she had always been there. With a skill born of long experience she had put questions and drawn deductions; every member of the household had paid to her toll of answers, willing or reluctant, and now in her best black silk she gazed up and down the table length with the air of one at ease and possessed of all necessary knowledge.

"I'm going with the ladies to their meeting to-night," she informed her cousin in a clear, carrying tone. "They want I should, and it's

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an excellent opportunity; some of the best known speakers are to take part, and I shall get a good idea of the subject."

"From one point of view," put in Mr. Farnham.

Miss Marilla leaned slightly forward and bent her gaze on him.

"One point of view is about all most folks can take in at once, without they're cross-eyed," she answered.

"Wouldn't you like me to take you to the meeting?" offered the captain, but Miss Marilla shook her head.

"We don't want anybody that isn't prepared to go with an open mind," she said, "and I happen to know yours is very far from open, Cousin Gid. I s'pose you have other engagements, child," turning to Ruth Temple.

"Yes," said the girl, "I have. I'm going to the theatre."

"Good for you," said Miss Marilla. "When you're young you can take your choice of entertainments. When you get to my age you snap at the first thing that comes along, unless you're

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prepared to sit front o' the fire every night, and mourn your past."

"I stand prepared to take you to the play any evening you say so," and the captain looked at her reproachfully, and at the same moment Mrs. Hitchings addressed her.

"I trust it is not in the light of an entertainment that you are looking forward to the evening," she said austere.

"That's the way I'm looking at everything down here," said Miss Marilla with an air of reckless gaiety. "Isn't it 'most time to start?"

Although not permitted to act as escort Captain Bold awaited his cousin's return, and it was well after ten o'clock when he and Mrs. Rose Tippet, with whom he had been conferring as to the probable whereabouts of the party, heard a latch-key. The captain stepped to the door, followed by Mrs. Tippet.

"I was afraid something had occurred," he said to Mrs. Hitchings who was removing her latch-key. "You spoke of returning soon after nine."

To his dismay Mrs. Hitchings passed him

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without a glance and proceeded to mount the stairs with an uncompromisingly heavy tread. After her sped Miss Rawson, who had the air of being withdrawn from all spectators. Behind her with arms interlocked came Mrs. Damon and Miss Marilla. They lurched unsteadily over the threshold, and for one horrible moment the captain thought that one or the other if not both of them had indulged in some unwonted stimulant. It appeared that Miss Marilla was the less demoralized of the two.

"You let us sit down and get our breaths," she said feebly, "and we'll tell you about it, or I will. Here, you take the sofa," she advised her companion, "and lean back. Don't try to talk yet."

"We've been trodden under foot," gasped Mrs. Damon, her large features working and her eyes suffused with a mist which speedily resolved itself into tears.

"What!" cried the captain, while Mrs. Tippet busied herself with stuffing cushions behind the sufferer and Miss Marilla, who had sunk into an armchair, looking quite limp and

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forlorn. She rallied, however, and spoke her mind, once for all.

"I'm not saying where the blame lies, for I don't know," she said; "but what I do know is that a parcel of women who'll turn themselves into a mob because one of 'em thinks she smells smoke, and won't listen to reason set forth to 'em from the platform as loud as a man can holler, aren't fit to govern anything or anybody, in my opinion. Did Mrs. Damon or I want to leave our seats? Indeed we didn't! but we were pressed out of 'em and carried along down the aisle and out into the corridor, willy-nilly! Sometimes we were carried backward, sometimes we were jammed against each other and again almost torn apart.

"And what 'most finished this poor woman," Miss Marilla bent a pitying glance on the agitated bulk on the sofa, "what 'most finished her was being knocked down by a big 'Don't Push' sign mounted on a kind of an easel. I kep' my hold on her, well as I could, and I was able to pull her up, but the back breadth of my skirt is in ribbons, where I was clawed and

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clutched by those that came behind. And you just cast your eye on my hat, will you?" she requested Mrs. Tippet. "Does it look to you as if I could ever wear it again?"

"It's a shame," said Mrs. Tippet, the soft color rising in her cheeks. "A perfect shame! and it was such a pretty hat."

"'Twas suitable for my years," said Miss Marilla, "and the materials were of the best, but as I told Mrs. Hitchings, she's a heavy built woman, and let her plant one of her feet right in the crown of a hat, it isn't ever going to be the same again. She and Miss Rawson were close behind, driving us, when the 'Don't Push' board struck Mrs. Damon, and they passed right over us, as you might say. Talking of it in the drug-store afterward they didn't seem to recall having any trouble getting out, but we know about it, I guess, don't we?"

"I'd never have believed it of Mrs. Hitchings," panted the victim on the sofa. "You might have expected it of Miss Rawson, being such a nervous make-up and afraid of fire, but Mrs. Hitchings' voice rose above everybody's

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else, just bellowing, 'Make Way ! Make Way !' only of course I can't do it loud for my strength's all gone. If poor Mr. Damon could see me now, I don't know what he'd say. I've always had such a sheltered life."

"You're a poor one to try any o' this woman's rights business," said Miss Marilla firmly. "I hope this'll be the last of it for you. Now I'm going straight to bed. I'm not bruised as much as you, but I'm considerable shaken up. Cousin Gid, you can give me your arm to go up-stairs, if you've a mind."

"I thought 'twas best to leave that poor scared woman to Mrs. Tippet," said Miss Marilla when the door of her room was attained. "How did you get on to-night? Don't tell me you let the time go to waste."

"I don't know what you mean," said the captain, turning a lively scarlet under her gaze. "I was in my room reading till well after nine."

Miss Marilla surveyed him from under her battered head-gear with a mixture of scorn and amusement.

"I declare I don't know what the Lord's

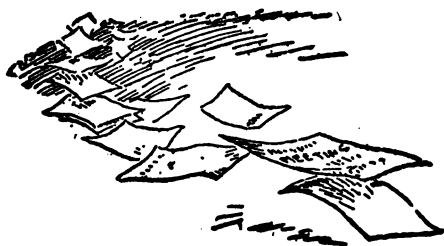
CAP'N GID

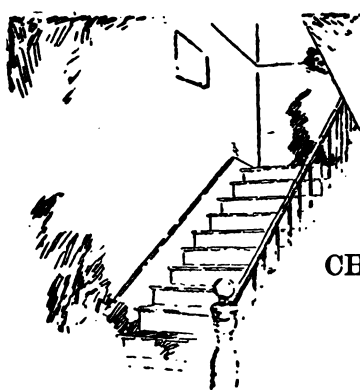
thinking of to give men so little sense as the most of 'em have," she said as she turned from him.

"And just now you appear to think most women are fools," said the captain with some spirit. "Nobody suits you, seems to me."

By way of response his cousin gave him only an enigmatical smile along with her "good-night" as she closed the door.

"I wasn't going to tell her I started out to make Mrs. Tippet a little call in her sitting-room and heard a man's voice in there talking loud, and hers half-crying," thought the captain, as he entered his room a moment later. "And if Miss Rawson doesn't stop trying to tell me whatever 'tis she's ferreted out I'll—she'll regret it, that's all! She'd better let me alone."





CHAPTER XVIII

“OH, no, I’m quite sure you are mistaken,” said Mrs. Rose Tippet to the visitor who sat rocking and surveying her with a determined but agreeable air. “Captain Bold has been very kind to me; no one else has been so kind and thoughtful. But I am quite sure it is just his friendliness. And I respect him so highly.”

“You’ve no need to lose your respect for him because he’s waited till late in life to fall in love,” said Miss Marilla. “That’s what he’s done. I was engaged once; he married another woman, but I know the signs. I knew what was the matter with Cousin Gid from his letters

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before I came down here. Writing me about the 'spring in the air.' The spring's in *him*; that's where 'tis. Any reason why he shouldn't fall in love with you if he likes?"

"Yes, I think there is a good reason," said Mrs. Tippet, avoiding Miss Marilla's eyes. "I think there is a very good reason."

"Is your husband living?" asked Miss Marilla bluntly.

"Oh, no, he died more than two years ago," said Mrs. Tippet.

"I can't think of anything else that would be a good and sufficient reason for your not taking Cousin Gid if you like him," said Miss Marilla thoughtfully. "You must be twenty years younger, but that's no objection, to me. You're of sound mind."

"I hope I am," Mrs. Tippet smiled faintly. "I don't feel quite sure of it, when it comes to money matters. In spite of all Mrs. Hinchings' advice I can't make this house pay. And I have debts. Oh! I ought not to tell you. I am horrified at myself! Meat and *everything* costs so much!"

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Miss Marilla's shrewd face wore a very kindly look.

"You ought to tell somebody, child," she said, "and you don't want to tell Gid yet. I can see that. You tell me."

"Every one pays good board ; I think really they pay too much," said Mrs. Tippetts simply ; "of course I get nothing from Mrs. Hitchings' room, because she lent me the money to start here, buy the things I needed for the house, you know ; but every one else pays ; and it's just the awful bills that seem to eat up all the profits ; I go over and over my account books evenings, and it makes me almost distracted. The tradesman's bills, the gas bills, all the little extra things that are so sure to count up into big sums at the end of the month ! I've never been used to handling money. Sometimes—sometimes I think I have made a mistake in trying to keep a boarding-house."

"I shouldn't wonder if you had." Miss Marilla looked at her sharply but kindly. "What would you get for Mrs. Hitchings' room and board a week if you were free to charge for it ?"

CAP'N GID

"Fifteen dollars a week," said Mrs. Tippet ; "it is a large room, and sunny. I got that while she was away last summer."

"M-m," said Miss Marilla ; "then, allowing for a good high rate of interest, I judge she must have loaned you upwards of ten thousand dollars."

"Oh, no !" cried Mrs. Tippet. "How could you think I would borrow such a sum, when I should never, *never* be sure of paying it back ! But she did lend me a thousand dollars—and now it seems like a million, when I think of it—and I think of it most of the time, for Mrs. Hitchings is disappointed in me ; I haven't nearly as much ability as she imagined, she says."

"Haven't you ?" said Miss Marilla. "Well, she has enough to make up. A woman that can get sixty per cent. interest on a thousand dollar loan has what I call business ability—that is, unless I should call it something that isn't quite so complimentary."

"Oh, but I haven't looked at it that way," said Mrs. Tippet. "You see, she didn't oblige me to give her a note, or anything."

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"Well, I shouldn't think even she'd have had the face to ask for a note when she made sure of getting her money back with twenty per cent. interest by the end of your two years' lease," said Miss Marilla grimly. "At the end of that time I suppose she calculates to leave you high and dry. Isn't that her plan?"

"She is going abroad, she says, at the end of this season," admitted Mrs. Tippet. She looked distressed and bewildered.

"Well, if ever anybody needed a man to look after her it's you," stated Miss Marilla. "Why haven't you asked any of 'em here for advice? That Corcoran man is a foolish talker with his jokes, but he has good common sense when it comes to business; and I've no doubt that other one, Farnham, if you could get his mind off his stomach and liver for a few minutes, would be worth something. And letting those two go by, why in the world haven't you talked to Gid? He'd have liked nothing better than helping you. There isn't a man, woman or child up in Pelling that hasn't come to him one time or another. There's a whole

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possy of 'em now just waiting for him to get over his mad and go home. He'll have enough matters to settle to keep him busy for a month steady. Why haven't you talked to him?"

"I have talked to him about all sorts of things, and he has helped me in many ways," said Mrs. Tippet, looking down at her slender hands. "But Mrs. Hitchings warned me never to trouble my boarders with my own worries; she said they would leave if I did. She has had a great deal of experience; she has boarded for fifteen years."

"Is that all?" inquired Miss Marilla. "I should have supposed she'd been at it twice as long at least. Well now, see here, do you give me leave to tell my cousin what you've told me? I promise you it won't make *him* leave, not till he's good and ready."

"I'm afraid he won't understand about Mrs. Hitchings," and Mrs. Tippet's eyes were full of trouble. "She was—she has been very kind to me, but lately, since Captain Bold came and before that, she has been dissatisfied with me, and sometimes speaks quite—quite sharply. I

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think most men do not wish to hear that sort of thing, and I'm afraid Captain Bold does not like her."

"You'd be something more than 'afraid' if you had my privileges of hearing him speak freely—you'd be sure and certain. There"—and Miss Marilla rose with her usual decision of movement, "I mustn't stay here talking with you another minute. I'm wasting my own time and hindering you, no doubt. I'll come in again."

"I didn't quite get at the cause of her thinking she couldn't marry Gid if he asked her," she mused as she walked slowly along the street, "but I shall find out, give me a little more time. She didn't *say* she'd marry him if there wasn't any obstacle, but on the other hand she didn't say she wouldn't. I think it's a kind of a hopeful outlook for Gid if I can put a little sprawl into him and he doesn't bungle too much. I'd give five cents to know what makes him shy off so whenever I start talking about her. Now that time with the Widow Mason, and all the other times he's

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been free-spoken with me ; he could hardly get out the words fast enough to tell me he didn't want part or parcel of 'em. I wonder if he ——”

In the very middle of the crossing Miss Marilla stopped and stamped her foot.

“I'll wager that's the root of it !” she said aloud, and suddenly felt her elbow in a firm grasp and herself under the guidance of a tall policeman.

“Got some kind of a little seizure, ma'am ?” he said in a calm but sympathetic tone as they reached the curb-stone. “Saw you just in time before that auto got you. How would it be if you stepped into the drug-store and let me call a cab for you ? I wouldn't try walking any farther, seems to me.”

“Let go of me !” said Miss Marilla, upturning an indignant face to meet his gaze. “Don't you know the difference between a woman stopping a minute when an idea strikes her, and one having a fit ? Let go, I tell you !”

“Very well, ma'am,” and the policeman regarded her with an injured air, as he released

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her elbow. "Only you'd better not have your next idea strike you in the middle of the street, unless you want it to be the last one you ever have. That's my advice, and you needn't thank me for it, either."

It was several days before there came to Miss Marilla what she considered a fitting opportunity to tell her cousin about the financial dealings of Mrs. Hitchings. At the time she chose Captain Bold was accompanying her home from a concert at which they had experienced doubtful joy.

"He banged the ivories in great style," the captain said impatiently as they reached the cool air of the street, grateful to their cheeks after the heat of the crowded hall; "his fingers were all right, I guess, but the heart wasn't there. You wait till you hear Ruth Temple play one o' those very pieces and you'll see the difference."

"I've been expecting you'd say that," remarked Miss Marilla indulgently. "She is a pretty player, that child, there's no doubt of it. But see here, Cousin Gid, there's something I

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want to tell you, and I never get a fair chance when we're in the house, on account of that Miss Rawson being everywhere at once as you might say. You listen to me now."

The captain listened obediently, and with every minute his wrath mounted higher.

"By George! You let me get at that woman!" he cried at last. "You let me——"

"S-sh," counseled Miss Marilla, jerking his arm. "I've been stopped by one policeman; that's enough for our family. If you don't quit blasting out that way like as not we'll both be arrested for disturbing the peace. Say whatever you want to, but say it low, for pity's sake."

The captain's voice sank to an inarticulate rumble, but he bore his cousin along so rapidly that at last she protested.

"You can't say anything to Mrs. Hitchings to-night, Gid," she told him, dragging her feet to retard his progress. "Don't haul me over the ground so! She's gone away to address a meeting and stay over night. And you listen to me again—if you're holding off from Mrs. Tippet on my account let me tell you that

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Cousin Edward, out in Iowa, has written beseeching me to come back out there where I was born and help him look after the children, and I'm wild to go for a year, anyway. After that we'll see. I could divide my time, if best. There's a good deal of thinking for you to do," she ended in a tone of deep meaning—"and you'd better do it. You stop thinking about the two young folks. They're getting on all right. *You consider your own case.*"

That night the captain had a recurrent dream which closely resembled a nightmare. In it he confronted Mrs. Rose Tippet, absolutely tongue-tied, with his Cousin Marilla at his elbow, saying in a loud whisper: "Now's your chance! Ask her!"

After passing through this experience for the third time the captain woke to find himself sitting up in bed, in a cold perspiration, and hearing strange sounds.

"What's that noise, and where does it come from?" he asked, aloud. "It's a drip from something, that's what it is. I guess I'd better get up and see to it. By thunder, it sounds like

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a big leak somewhere! Let me get into my clothes and see what's going on."

He turned on the light and by its aid achieved a hybrid costume which he deemed sufficient for his explorations. Cautiously opening the door he peered out into the hall, where one light was burning dimly. At that moment a clock in the neighborhood gave out the hour of three.

"Pretty time to be up," muttered the captain, "but listen to that, will you? The water's pouring down somewhere. I must see to it. It's below here."

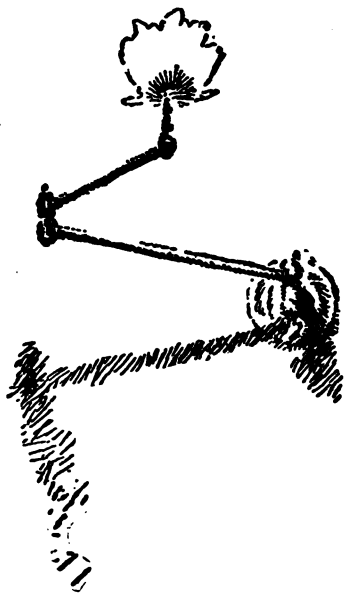
He had gone part way down when there came a crash and a thud. The captain cleared the remaining stairs at a bound, and rushed into the parlor.

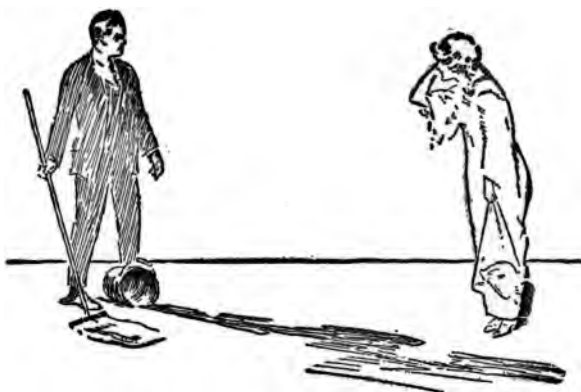
"What in—where in ——" he shouted and tore up the stairs again to the door of Mrs. Hitchings' room, from beneath which a little stream of water was oozing out into the hall. He heard Mrs. Tippet's voice as she hurried to the parlor from her room behind it, and from above he was assailed by a volley of questions.

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Miss Rawson's voice, raised to a shriek, followed him over the threshold.

"Is the house on fire?" she cried from the stair rail over which she hung in a pale green kimono, her scanty locks done up in what Miss Marilla called "kid caterpillars." "Will somebody tell me at once? I have valuable papers."





CHAPTER XIX

THE captain paid no heed to questions. "Bring pails, buckets, mops, cloths, anything that'll hold water," he roared, appearing in the doorway. "This whole place is afloat! I've turned off the faucet, but there's plenty of trouble here and down-stairs. The women folks'd better keep away. I don't want any petticoats in this room. Where's Mrs. Tippet?"

Down the stairs, neatly and completely clad in a rubber rain-coat, came Miss Marilla.

"Put on yours and come, too," she said to

CAP'N GID

Ruth Temple. "Gid doesn't know what he wants. Men never do."

Mr. Corcoran, Mr. Farnham and Jack Severance had responded to the captain's call, each with a bath-towel in his hand.

"Here, you give me those towels," commanded Miss Marilla. "A minute more won't make any difference, and there's no sense ruining everything the poor little soul has in the house. I'll get some suitable cloths. Mr. Severance, you come down with me."

Meekly the men surrendered their bath-towels, and obediently Jack Severance followed his leader down-stairs. As they reached the parlor door they heard a sound as of one laughing and crying at the same time.

"She's got hysterics," whispered Miss Marilla. "Well, no wonder. My stars! look in there!"

The great red sofa bore a mass of sodden plaster; the largest of the flaming armchairs had received another mass, while from the ceiling depended in various places more plaster, apparently ready to leave its moorings and add to the wreckage below. And just inside the

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door in a soft brown wrapper, with her hair braided down her back, and curling around her face, with shining eyes and flushed cheeks, stood Mrs. Rose Tippet, laughing, with every now and then a little catch in her breath that sounded like a sob.

"It's ruined, isn't it?" she said turning to Miss Marilla. "Don't you think it is really ruined? The stains would never come out of that red, would they? I'm *glad*!"

Miss Marilla spoke to her in a firm but soothing tone, laying a hand on her arm.

"You don't know what you're saying, poor child, and no wonder," she said, guiding Mrs. Tippet out of the room and toward the cleaning closet at the back of the house. "You lift that plaster off the furniture," she called over her shoulder to young Severance. "There's great damage done, but that Hitchings woman will have to pay for all of it. Leaving a faucet running, and the stopper in her bowl! I never heard of such work. It's a wonder she hasn't flooded the whole house and drowned us all."

"She went away in a great hurry right after

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dinner," said Mrs. Tippet. "I was so tired I went to bed early and slept soundly. It happened that every one was in early last night. Mrs. Hitchings must have neglected to lock her door, or we couldn't have got in without breaking it down."

"Gid wouldn't have hesitated to break it down," said Miss Marilla. "Let's put these big tin pans on the parlor floor to catch the rest of the drip, while Mr. Severance starts up with some of these cloths and mops to set the men at work."

"Help me stem the rushing tide as it surges over the threshold," said Jack Severance, handing Ruth Temple a mop. "That will be a noble work. Think of our dear Mrs. Hitchings not being here to see what she's accomplished in the way of making home happy."

"You step right into the room with that mop, young man," laughed Miss Marilla who with Mrs. Tippet had reached the second story, carrying a couple of pails. "We women folks can sop up what little comes out here with these sponges. What's that floating round in the

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middle of the floor? Hand that to me, Gid, whatever 'tis. It's a solid wad o' handkerchiefs! Well, I never! She was soaking 'em out in her bowl."

"Oh, I don't think she could have been!" said Mrs. Tippet. "She told me that was one of the things I must never allow the boarders to do. I've always spoken of it to them."

"You never spoke to her of it, I'll wager," said Miss Marilla grimly. "She saw to that—old schemer!"

"You spoke to me," said Miss Rawson, an accusing eye on Mrs. Tippet. "To *me*—when all my washing goes to the Sunlight Laundry, and always has! It might have been considered an insult, if I'd chosen to take it so."

"I'm glad you had a few grains o' common sense," said Miss Marilla. "Here, you come down another stair and take one o' these sponges. Unless you're planning to keep moving I should advise you to go back to bed. It's damp here to be standing 'round doing nothing. You can squeeze your sponge into this pail Miss Temple and I are using."

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"I never expected to have anything like this to do," said Miss Rawson, divided between rebellion and the desire to see all that went on.

"Didn't you, now?" and Miss Marilla wrung out her sponge with great vigor. "What a good thing it is for all of us to get a surprise once in a while. I can't say that I was counting on just this sort of early morning work when I accepted Cousin Gid's invitation, but here I am. There, Mrs. Tippet, you stop work and let us finish. Don't you think you'd better go down into the parlor and see if it's stopped dripping? You might need to move something more."

As Mrs. Tippet went down the stairs, Miss Marilla stepped over the threshold of the room in which the men were working.

"Can't you be spared a minute, Gid?" she asked. "Mrs. Tippet's gone down to see about the parlor and she might need help. Well, you men have been real smart in here, I must say. Mr. Farnham, you let me take that cloth a minute and you rest. You're all beat out, you've worked so hard."

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"I've never had the reputation of being a shirk, madam, when there was work to be done," said Mr. Farnham. "It is only in regard to the social duties that I am counted so remiss."

"Well, I'm sure you've been real social over this," said Miss Marilla, "and I don't know but it's done you good. You don't look half so yellow as usual, not half. But I'd go back to bed now."

"Thank you," said Mr. Farnham, "for the compliment and the advice, both of which I am obliged to accept. I begin to feel very chilly. I'll bid you good-morning."

Miss Marilla looked after him and shook her head.

"It's awful hard for him to be folksy," she said with regret. "Mr. Severance, you give me that mop and Mr. Corcoran and I will finish up here. You go see if Miss Temple's pail needs emptying. And you ask Miss Rawson if she will come in here a minute and help me. It's safe for her, now."

"I've always had delicate lungs," said Miss

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Rawson, stepping gingerly into the water-soaked room. "What am I to do here? What a looking place!"

"Isn't it?" and Miss Marilla gazed cheerfully about her. "And to think who it is that's done it! That's what pleases me. Mr. Corcoran, will you see if that door'll shut; just for curiosity, I'd like to know; water does swell things so. Can you push it way to? It does go, doesn't it? Now my advice would be to leave it shut, long as we've dried off the sill; and if you'll open the register wide, we can maybe heat this up a little bit. Miss Rawson, you just help me with this place under the windows where two can work to better advantage than one, and then we'll call it done, unless Mr. Corcoran sees some other spot that needs special attention."

While Miss Marilla, able commander, worked with one chuckling, one reluctant helper, out in the hall Jack Severance stood smiling down at Ruth Temple.

"You look about fifteen," he told her, "and very domestic. There's nobody to hear, so I

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don't care what I say. You're having almost as good a time with that sponge as you do at a concert. You needn't say you aren't, for I know better. Your eyes are like stars, and I don't care how many other people, poets and commoners, have said it. And your hair is the prettiest thing I ever saw in all my life!"

"You mustn't talk that way," said Ruth Temple. "My hair must look perfectly dreadful and you know my hands are too wet and cold to do anything with it."

"I shall talk exactly that way," said Jack Severance, "and I thank the Lord for your wet hands; but they aren't cold, are they?"

"Cold—you just feel," said the girl indignantly, thrusting one hand at him.

His fingers closed over it, and held it fast.

"My pay was raised to-day," said Jack Severance, stooping till his face was close to hers. "Don't you think we could live handsomely on thirty-five dollars a week, and you give me a music lesson every evening, so you wouldn't miss your pupils?"

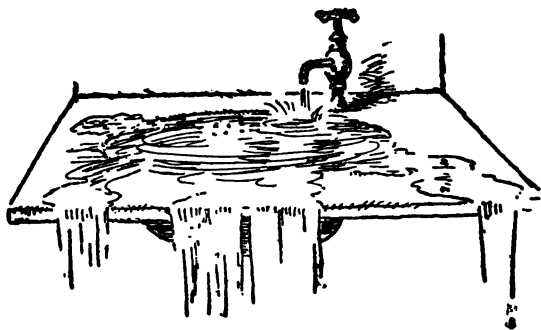
"Oh," said Ruth Temple, "I'm tired of

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teaching! At least—— Jack! oh, see what you've done! You've tipped the pail over! And there's all my work gone for nothing!"

Her last words had a smothered sound. A moment later Jack Severance seated her, flushed and laughing, on the stairs which led up to the next landing.

"You watch me wield the floor cloth," he said, "and see what a treasure you're going to have right in your family. What I've done up to the last three minutes has been half-hearted work. Now you'll see something worth while."





CHAPTER XX

WHEN Captain Bold entered the parlor for the second time Mrs. Rose Tippet was seated in the smallest chair in the room, looking about her with despair in her eyes. In several spots on the floor lay masses of plaster; two intermittent drips were gradually filling the pans placed to catch them; the carpet was soaked and stained for a good third of its area; the chairs were for the most part wet and streaked and the ceiling sagged forlornly all around the jagged bare spots from which the plaster had fallen. The captain stepped briskly up to Mrs. Tippet.

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"Now, don't you worry," he said cheerfully. "I'll take this whole matter right off your hands and settle it for you, if you'll let me. It's every bit of it the fault of that Hitchings woman, and I can testify to that in court if need be, but she won't let it come to that. I came home mad as a hornet last night, anyway, on account of what Cousin Marilla'd been telling me about the way that woman has cheated you ever since you took this house. After I've had a few minutes' conversation with her she'll be ready to do about as I say. But why in the world haven't you told me anything of it before? Don't you count me for a friend?"

Mrs. Tippettt looked up at him with a faint tinge of color in her cheeks. He stood directly before her, an unheroic figure with more than a suggestion of the grotesque in his appearance, but dependable from the crown of his head to his feet, which at that moment were encased in unbuttoned overshoes.

"Of course I count you for a friend," said Mrs. Rose Tippettt; "haven't I proved it by

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the many ways in which I have accepted help from you? But there are things about which I couldn't trouble you."

"I'd like to know why not," said the captain, folding his arms across the frogs of his flowered dressing-gown, the gift of Miss Marilla on his last birthday. "And 'twouldn't have been a trouble; 'twould have been a pleasure; don't you know that?"

His eyes were fastened on hers, which did not drop but, filled with anxiety, looked straight up at him.

"I'm not accustomed—it is a long while since any one has accounted it a pleasure to look after troublesome affairs for me," she said gently. "My father did it as long as he lived; but he has been dead for more than ten years."

"That's the idea," said the captain; "you just let me take his place. Anything that he did, I'll do."

"Oh," and then at last her eyes dropped, and she shook her head. "I'm afraid you couldn't."

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"Could, too," asserted the captain. "See here, I'm no eavesdropper, but I came down intending to make you a little call that evening of the suffrage meeting when Mrs. Damon came so near her end, and the man that was in your sitting-room was talking so loud I couldn't help hearing a good deal before I got out of ear-shot again. I know exactly how to attend to a man like that. You'll pay that debt you've assumed to the folks he represents when the time's up, and not a day before. You don't know any more about business than a kitten!" and he smiled indulgently down at her.

"But I shan't be able to pay them when the note is due," said Mrs. Tippet, raising her eyes again as if she found strength in the sight of the captain. "It's all I can do to pay the interest; he's had to wait for it twice. And he'll have to wait again next month."

"No he won't," said the captain, "not after I've talked to your other creditors and got things on a fair basis. You're going to make money this spring, and then we'll ——"

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At this point Miss Marilla first looked and then marched into the room.

"Well, how are you two getting on?" she asked with a businesslike air which put the captain into a cold perspiration such as his nightmare had brought out. "I've just given my congratulations to the two young folks overhead; they're so happy they didn't hear what I said, nor notice when I stepped over their feet on my way to the stairs."

"I've been telling Mrs. Tippet I'd like to look after her affairs just the way her father always did," said the captain uneasily. "She's in some little money difficulties that I can straighten out for her; and then, when we get Mrs. Hitchings on a proper paying basis—she has plenty to do with—Mrs. Tippet will be fixed complete; she'll have a tidy sum to put away every month as long as she stays here, to pay her interest and so on."

"Cousin Gid, you do try me to the very limit o' my patience," said Miss Marilla eyeing him with the air of one exasperated beyond endurance. "Now I've made up my mind what I'll

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do, and you listen to me. I will stay here with Mrs. Tippet till her lease runs out in September, and I'll show her how to make money out of this boarding-house and keep it even better than it's kept now. And in September, when her pocket's full, I'll take her out to Iowa with me. The change will do her good and I'd like to have Edward get a look at her. And if she decides to stay out there, as I think she will if Edward has as much common sense and spunk as he used to have, then I'll be free to come back and keep house for you."

The captain had stared at her, dismayed but speechless, from the moment she began; now as she paused for breath he gave her a beseeching glance and moistened his lips, but Miss Marilla bore on before he had made a sound.

"As for you," she said scornfully, "you can get right back to Pelling, and the sooner the better. You can board at the Gaynes's—see how you like her cooking—play backgammon with old Asa Dean, run with the fire-company, set out the drinking fountain, and play Providence to all the widows and incompetents up there. I'll look

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after Mrs. Tippet, and I shan't offer to be a father to her, either. You with your fathers!"

Neither of the cousins looked at Mrs. Rose Tippet for a moment. Then suddenly the captain unfolded his arms and straightened his back. In the rush of unlisted feelings that swept him far beyond embarrassment he recognized a desire to make himself as tall as possible. He forgot his scornful relative as completely as if she had been where a few moments before he had wished her, safe in Pelling, Vermont.

"Mrs. Tippet," he said, "will you please look up at me a minute? I want to take back almost everything I've said. I don't want to have your father's place at all. What I ——"

"Look out!" cried Miss Marilla. "That piece of plastering's coming right down on her head! Oh, you ——"

Two arms like steel had shot out from the captain's sides and lifted Mrs. Tippet from her chair just in time; but for the tired little woman held in safety the steel was turned to something warm and infinitely tender.

Miss Marilla, unregarded, made her way from

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the room. She spoke no word in her passage, but to the captain came once more the voice of his dream :

“Now's your chance ! Ask her !”

And that time he did.





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